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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore how the American writer Thomas Pynchon creates a functioning, working theological model for the “preterite” communities and spaces with three of his novels: *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Vineland* and *Against the Day*. Building on John McClure’s postsecular reading of Pynchon in *Partial Faiths* and religious readings of the texts by Dwight Eddins and Kathryn Hume, this thesis expands on the themes and theories presented in these critical works. In this thesis I posit that the theological material of Pynchon is largely underrepresented in Pynchon criticism, and what work there is does not engage with Pynchon as a complete religious writer. Through a socio-historical perspective, this work endeavours to express how important religious modes are to a variety of topics in the corpus, from politics, to history and Pynchon’s engagement with power structures and oppression. In exploring how religions inter-relate with both each other and more secular concerns, I analyse how Pynchon, across these three texts, fashions a dialogue of resistance that endorses the importance of spirituality. I build on McClure’s theories of a “partial” conversion narrative within the texts, and take this further to express a total commitment to spiritual systems that effects Pynchon’s wider concerns with resistance, liberation and transcendent spaces and possibilities.

This thesis explores Pynchon’s valorisation of pluralism and a heterodox approach to religious consumption, but also how he critiques it, creating a double quality that constantly shifts and morphs the spiritual discourse of the text. I argue that Pynchon’s ‘serious’ take on the spiritual dimensions within these novels shows him building a complex ethical and social system around preterition and resistance, and that resistance within the text is reliant on such spiritual discourse. Through this reading, this thesis posits that Pynchon’s spiritual framework cannot be considered as a mere aspect of his work, but core to a plethora of his social and political concerns.

TOWARDS A PRETERITE THEOLOGY:
RESISTANCE AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
NOVELS OF THOMAS PYNCHON

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PH.D THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated in its entirety to Rebecca Allinson Kirby.

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ABBREVIATIONS

In this thesis, references to Pynchon's novels will be abbreviated to the following within the text:

V.: *V.*

The Crying of Lot 49: *L49*

Gravity's Rainbow: *GR*

Slow Learner: *SL*

Vineland: *VL*

Mason & Dixon: *M&D*

Against the Day: *AtD*

INTRODUCTION

'...a community of grace, a gift of persistence...'

(*GR*, p. 266)

Proposal

This thesis is entitled *Towards a Preterite Theology: Resistance and Spirituality in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, and its goal is to provide a sustained reading of how Thomas Pynchon constructs a viable religious framework for the marginalised 'other' across three of his novels: *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland* and *Against the Day*. These three texts have been selected from the canon due to the radically different ways that they present resistant spiritual frameworks.

Gravity's Rainbow provides the foundation in this case for discussing spiritual resistance, as it both presents us with the first example of a complete and rigorous religious framework for considering marginalised communities in the form of Calvinism and preterition, and sets up a theological background for the concepts of control and oppression. While the novel posits the omnipotent power of these structures, it also offers us brief glimpses of other possible spiritual approaches such as Orphism, animism and magic. These alternative resistant spaces are built on and critiqued in his later works. *Vineland*, the first novel produced after *Gravity's Rainbow*, presents a more pragmatic and functional sense of spiritual resistance, (mainly) in the form of a Zen Buddhist approach that is refracted through a variety of ideas such as monastic living,

refuge and outlawry. It also provides a critique of New Ageism - something I will be covering in much detail in this thesis – that sees Pynchon questioning the validity of certain spiritual methods, and explores the concept of co-option and appropriation in religious practice. *Against the Day*, the most recent of Pynchon's larger, more encyclopaedic works, takes the resistant spiritualities that *Gravity's Rainbow* displays as fragile, transient things, and allows them to flex their muscles somewhat. He explores animism as a more aggressive and active spiritual entity, as well as providing a deeper connection between religion and political activism. *Against the Day* also has Pynchon displaying a double quality to his religious discourse, providing secular concepts with spiritual counter-selves that mediate between power and resistance, the scientific and the irrational. I will be approaching these texts not from a chronological position, but from a stance that shows the progression of Pynchon's attitude to theology's function in resistance. This requires me to look at *Gravity's Rainbow* first, exploring the religious foundation within power and resistance. The second text used will be *Against the Day*, as I intend to illustrate how the resistant powers posited in *Gravity's Rainbow* have evolved into more robust forms, and how an ethical framework is developed around those forms. I will end with *Vineland*, a closer and more focused and pragmatic look at the practice of spiritual resistance. I hope that this focused, intimate novel will provide a contrast with the larger, more global texts and provide a fresh look at Pynchon's theological approach to politics, resistance and ethics.

I will present in this work two central prepositions:

- (i) The first preposition is to do with a wider concern of mine about certain critical trends in Pynchon scholarship. I will argue that Pynchon provides us with this “double quality” in regards to his religious content. First, sustained critique of religion across the entirety of his work, but also a valorisation of

religion as a resistant power. These intersect with many facets of his novels – including history, politics, and science – and these can be reconsidered through theological readings of the texts. Religious discourse provides a meta-narrative that spans across the corpus that sees Pynchon constantly refining how theology is explicitly linked to vital aspects of his writing. In particular how religion is presented as systems of control and power, and also how he is continually readdressing and mirroring these systems for salvific content. Concepts that have been repeatedly worked on in Pynchon scholarship can be readdressed, and considered to be primarily theological considerations – these include paranoia, political resistance and theoretical approaches to history, memory and mythology. Using this approach, I make the claim that Pynchon can be considered primarily as a religious writer, or at the very least a writer whose work is permeated across the board with religiosity, and his texts allow us to witness a coherent and sustained religious meta-narrative that allows him to be considered as a writer with central religious concerns that instruct his approach to power and resistance, rather than a writer for whom these concerns are peripheral to such debates.

- (ii) The second preposition is a less contentious one, but it will lead on from and explores, via several sustained close readings of the texts, the concepts within the first. This thesis will posit that Pynchon's theological material illuminates an ethical concern for the marginalised, or to be more apt the 'preterite', the rejected and 'passed-over' demographics that Pynchon writes about so sympathetically. Pynchon's discourse with these people and cultures engages with notions of oppression, leading later into the ethics of resistance and terrorism, but also has him establish a liberating ethic around

nostalgia, community and family. All of these considerations are consistently dealt with through religious frameworks. When Pynchon writes about the marginalised and the 'marginalisers', each component is given a corresponding theological framework. The systems of oppression and capitalism are expressed through the elitism of Calvinist discourse, and power and industrialisation are mediated via *Gnostic* mysticism and asceticism. In turn, the resistant methods of the preterite are framed by animism, and the ethics of the marginalised are backed up by a sustained exploration of Zen Buddhism. Pynchon's texts also set up a dichotomy between the secular and the religious, seeing little of value in the former, and providing numerous avenues of resistance and hope in the latter. Overall, I posit that spirituality in general is key to Pynchon's work, and while all of his major concerns regarding resistance, liberation and community sometimes appear to be secular in nature, they are irrevocably connected to theological frameworks.

The scholarly stance on the importance of Pynchon's theological content is divided. For example, while Kathryn Hume and Dwight Eddins have produced extensive work on mythology and Gnosticism respectively, others are adamant that religion is a trivial matter within the corpus. John Stark in *Pynchon's Fictions* suggests that a theological reading of Pynchon can offer us nothing of serious value, stating that critical work on religion offers only 'random details [that] do not lead to a religious interpretation that significantly illuminates the novels.'¹ I must state here that Stark's empirical statement is radically dismissive, but does inform us in some way of the attitudes of scholars towards a theological understanding of Pynchon. Other more

¹ John O. Stark, *Pynchon's Fictions* (Ohio: Athens University Press, 1980), p. 120.

sensitive readings of religion have been achieved in first-wave Pynchon criticism, notably by David Cowart, Edward Mendelson and Joseph Slade, a foundation for reading the Calvinism and Gnosticism content of the texts, but often there is a reticence to fully delve into the theological structures themselves, and often the myriad religious structures employed by Pynchon are considered a homogenous entity, or loosely categorised by the umbrella term 'occult'. There are notable exceptions to this of course, for instance Stephen Weisenburger's exhaustive efforts on Pynchon's source material both in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* and his works on the Herero published sporadically in the *Pynchon Notes* journal offer numerous engagements with Pynchon's theological material. Kathryn Hume's *Pynchon's Mythography* provides us with an extensive reading of Pynchon's engagement with myth and mythic tropes, but is tightly focused on a handful of theological content, and stops short of directly engaging with Pynchon's serious take on spirituality. Dwight Eddins' *The Gnostic Pynchon* is another example, a tight and detailed exploration of how Gnosticism functions in the texts, but any wider exploration of Eddins' work has not yet been significantly handled, and his work still remains somewhat peripheral in the critical analysis of Pynchon's power structures. This is an injustice, as it is Eddins out of all critics who successfully grants Pynchon the status of a religious author, claiming that *Gravity's Rainbow* is, above all else, a religious text. It is perhaps this conflict between critical opinions of Pynchon as a secular and a religious writer, that allows the possible stagnation of a more integral religious analysis of Pynchon. Such a dramatic opposition can again be seen in Stark's work, where religion is ousted as a viable approach in favour of more traditional and 'fashionable' forays into postmodernist readings:

...religion plays two roles in Pynchon's work. It is the source of detail used to develop characters, to advance the plot, and in general to tell the stories. Religion's importance in this regard has been overemphasised, mainly because of overzealous myth criticism.²

Such dismissals of theological readings are common in criticism of postmodern fiction but, as Amy Hungerford explains in *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960*, Pynchon can be seen as part of a new form of postmodernism:

The writers I have considered here [chiefly Pynchon, DeLillo, Morrison and Ginsberg], both novelists and critics, seek a version of literary authority closely allied to the ambitions of modernism – to reveal in art the large-scale structures of the world as well as the very texture of consciousness, to make religion a secular religion and critics its priestly caste. If postmodernism on Beckett's model entailed stripping away grand narratives, if writers of fiction like John Cheever, Raymond Carver, or even an experimentalist like Kathy Acker turned to the short novel or the small form of the story, one might say that the writers I have considered represent a different kind of postmodernism, something Joycean in scale and ambition. DeLillo, Pynchon, McCarthy, and Morrison are of a piece in this respect, in turning to the world-encompassing tradition of the novel that Joyce represents.³

This 'different kind of postmodernism' that Hungerford posits in her book allows us to bypass the traditional postmodern view of Pynchon as a chaotic and impenetrable writer, and means we can consider how Pynchon approaches theology and creates a theological meta-narrative across his work that bleeds into political, historical and social discourse. Recent criticism now seems to be more sympathetic towards this new approach to postmodern writers.

Now as a further four novels have been published by Pynchon since 1990, religion has become much more present in the field of Pynchon studies. Hume once again returns to religion to provide a Catholic reading of 2006's *Against the Day* that seeks to

² Ibid, p. 120.

³ Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 136.

explore Pynchon's ethics of sin and penance. Christopher Coffman's 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: The Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon's Ecological Ethic' reconsiders Gnosticism in *Against the Day*, and also delves into the animistic content of the text. Robert Kohn returns to the older material with a Buddhist reading in 'Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*' which allows us to return to that text from a completely fresh angle. Victoria Price in *Christian Allusions in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* provides us with a Weisenburger-esque work that positions Pynchon's novels again as religious texts, in a similar vein to Eddins' work on the *Gnostic*. In recent times, at least, we can see Pynchon scholarship adopting a heterodox approach to the texts, often focusing more on specific aspects while jettisoning the older, more generalised postmodern framework. What I hope this thesis will achieve is the beginnings of a wider and in-depth understanding of the importance of religious discourse to these new and sometimes esoteric avenues of research.

Postsecularism

While much of the new critical work on Thomas Pynchon embraces theological readings to varying degrees, synergy between religion and other approaches is still lacking. A sustained discussion of Pynchon as a religious writer that looks at theology as a larger, encompassing concern, has not yet received the attention it requires. Religious analysis remains in a vacuum, separate from an understanding of Pynchon as a postmodern writer. This problem has, however, been tackled by John McClure in his 2007 work *Partial Faiths*. The work itself is an exploration into religious discourse *within* the postmodern space, dealing with a wide variety of writers including Tony

Kushner, Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo and Pynchon himself. The key term that McClure uses here is 'postsecularism'.

McClure's work deals with the resurgence of religious material in a postmodern setting, allowing for religion to be a multitudinous method of resisting modernist and secularist ideas of orthodoxy, oppression and fundamentalism. His approach to postsecularism appears akin to my own, claiming that the majority of postmodern writers are engaging with a new, heterogeneous type of religious thinking (Pynchon being chief among them) and this thesis functions as an attempt to build upon McClure's research, and expand upon his postsecular theories using these texts. He states that this theological interest is one that looks towards a 'supernatural multiculturalism'⁴ that posits points of resistance against the increasingly unstable monoliths of secularism and rationalism. McClure continues to push the importance of postsecular space within postmodern work, stating that there is a resonance that can be felt within other non-religious aspects of these works. Theology in these texts is not an isolated theme to be studied separately from more secular areas (science, philosophy, genre, history et cetera), but instead a viable method of understanding ethical and political issues; 'postsecular thought is political through and through.'⁵

In his reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*, McClure also cites Dwight Eddins' *The Gnostic Pynchon* as being 'an essential resource'⁶, a ground-breaking religious reading of Pynchon that has not achieved the critical attention that it should have. He also brings up Mendelson's 'The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*' and Hume's *Pynchon's Mythography* as being seminal works on the religious in Pynchon, but then concludes (as I have myself) that such readings still exist in isolation from the core of

⁴ John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens : The University of Georgia Press, 2006), p. 19.

⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁶ Ibid, p. 39.

the postmodernist analysis: 'the Pynchon who figures in postmodernist theory rarely if ever gets discussed in these terms.'⁷ This continued dismissal of religious discourse within the more 'serious' postmodern discussions is problematic, and stops the critic from 'any sustained consideration of the content of various worlds projected in contemporary fiction, content that is often explicitly religious, and [instead] to fix attention instead on the implications of their juxtaposition.'⁸

McClure seeks to solve this problem by arguing that the re-evaluation of the secular cuts deep into the heart of postmodern considerations of power, structure and ontology. The postsecular engagement with religious modes of thought widens the scope for issues such as resistance, ethical considerations and pluralist thought, allowing theological material to infiltrate ideas of community, post-Enlightenment thinking and innovation in the face of a singular, narrow, "modernist" cosmology. According to McClure, one of the main duties of postsecularism is an ethical approach to the world, linking together 'spiritual sustenance and political responsibility.'⁹

McClure posits two main processes at work in postsecular literature: Conversion narratives, and reverse demystification. The first process is the simpler of the two, stating that postsecular narratives 'trace the turn of secular-minded characters back towards the religious'¹⁰. Postsecular fiction usually has characters making this transition from the secular into a religious mode, but this movement is never into a clear ontological territory. A 'break with the secular real does not lead in postsecular narrative to the triumphant reappearance of a well-mapped, familiar, religious cosmos,'¹¹ but instead finds an incomplete and unstable spiritual world that reflects not a structurally

⁷ Ibid, p. 27.

⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

⁹ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 4.

sound alternative to the secular world, but a pluralistic one that may or may not hold pockets of resistance and hope that have previously been eroded by dominant systems of power. One orthodoxy is not replaced by another (such would be the worrying modern trend of fundamentalism), but instead by quasi-religious communities that are 'small, fragile and transitory.'¹² The postsecular conversion narrative is indeed a “partial” one, not fully transporting characters into a separate and fully-formed spiritual world like traditional conversions, but instead opening them up to a confusing and infinite array of spiritual possibilities that exist in a mediating zone between the secular world and an extra-terrestrial spirit domain. McClure’s interpretation of postsecularism is concerned less with the establishment of rigid religious structure, but allows instead for religion to be considered integral to the establishment of non-conformist and fluid attitudes in resistant acts.

It is in this that we can begin to see the utility of postsecular criticism. Its conversion narratives are not exclusively religious, but instead describe a wider journey from a rigid, singular orthodox way of thinking towards one that embraces diversity, plurality and ethical responsibility. It tends to be equally critical of institutionalised religion as it is of the secular world, rejecting the grandeur of more traditional theology in favour of a more vital and mutable form of spiritual life that lauds a more general ‘veneration of life’ over a glorification of a particular dogma or deity, an approach that is characteristic of Pynchon’s work, which continually exudes an 'anarchist distrust of classical norms and hierarchies.'¹³ McClure states that postsecularism critiques and rejects 'the codes of theological order and exclusivity that characterize “high” religious traditions,' and instead

¹² Ibid, p. 4.

¹³ Ibid, p. 31.

develop modes of thought and practice that are scandalously impure. They directly address recognizable social evils – militant nationalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and the ongoing assault on the environment. And they seem to work: the characters who embrace them are spiritually regenerated and the communities themselves provide hints of new social practices and ideas.¹⁴

The radical part of this approach is the spiritualisation of secular political entities. In a technique that McClure ascribes in particular to Pynchon, the conflict at the heart of Pynchon's own particular brand of postsecularism is not between the divine and the secular, but between a spirituality that endorses these new practices and ideas and the older, established religious orthodoxies that endorse oppression and hierarchy. The secular world of capitalism and control is given religious identity, and thus the opposition transpires as a purely theological conflict, with antagonistic religious structures merely masquerading as secular apparatus. As McClure claims, 'Pynchon resists reducing the world either to a single coherent domain or to a battlefield hosting two and only two opposing forces.'¹⁵ Indeed, there is a surface tension between the spiritual world and the secular one in the novels, but deeper analysis suggests that there is tension amidst the theological structure of his work itself, with some spiritual systems seen as potentially liberating, and others as oppressive and aggressive. *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, traces both the immense suffering that the secular world has brought, but also acts as a discourse between an ecological, 'Orphic' (to use Eddins' phrasing) sense of spiritual renewal, and an unpleasant industrial world that is the manifestation of Calvinist and *Gnostic* dogma. In this way, Pynchon manages to incorporate a myriad of social, historical and political concerns into the novel, all held together within this tumultuous theological structure. *Gravity's Rainbow's* purpose – if

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 40.

it has a definite one – is to illuminate the secular, rational world as a religious entity, revealing it as a system underwritten entirely by Christian and *Gnostic* doctrine and then providing spiritual possibilities for resistance against it. As McClure agrees, '*Gravity's Rainbow* is designed to drive home the power of this order and begin exploring ways to break its spell.'¹⁶ For Pynchon, the postsecular conversion narrative is not the movement from a godless to a god-abundant world, but rather the liberation from a traditional religious mode of control into a neo-religious spirituality.

This notion of Pynchon revealing the world to be at the mercy of theological concepts leads us on to McClure's second function of the postsecular, reverse demystification. McClure reverses the traditional, Enlightenment concept of a demystification narrative where there is a transition from a pluralist, spiritual cosmology into a narrower, rational and logical secular one. Instead, McClure posits that postsecular literature takes the stance that 'to be disenchanted is to lose sight of all these aspects of the cosmos,'¹⁷ meaning that, as Pynchon himself repeatedly claims, the secular world is not a 'true state', but the closing off of the possibility of a pluralistic universe. To be delivered *back* into a religious discourse is to be re-enchanted, and the dulling technique of the secular is washed away and the subject is 'demystified' from the secular and ready once more to reconsider the world to be a spiritual one. Indeed, as I have previously claimed, the secular components of *Gravity's Rainbow* (and by extension, many of his other texts) are transformed into religious entities in themselves, and thus this 'should make us suspicious of the secular/sacred dichotomy'¹⁸ that would appear in a more simplistic (and far less effective) discourse between the divine and the profane. In fact, Pynchon's work seeks not just to illuminate a theological structure

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 30.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 30.

operating the pulleys and levers of a previously apparent secular world, but to attempt to 'both re-enchant the world and to change the very terms of enchantment.'¹⁹ Once he invites the reader to accept this dizzying plurality of religious structures, some demonic while others benign, he then attempts to not just explore the avenues of resistance *within* this theology, but the very possibility of such liberation.

A key part of Pynchon's postsecularism is the slowly evolving construction of spirituality for the preterite of his novels. In Calvinist terminology, preterition is the opposite of election, a state of being passed-over by grace. In *Gravity's Rainbow* there is a tension between election and preterition, with the aggressive industrial complex taking on the role of the elected elite, and the downtrodden masses presented as the preterite, as well as a complex dialogue taking place over the ontologies of these positions, and a reconsideration of them as a dogmatic divide. I will go into greater detail as to the intricate discussion of Calvinist dogma in *Gravity's Rainbow* in chapter one, but for now I will cover in general how Pynchon uses these "preterite spiritualities" as a foundation for his own form of postsecular spiritual resistance.

Preterition becomes, in Pynchon's work, the general term for the marginalised in all senses of the word, be it religious in nature, or historical, social or political. Preterition is at times (mainly in *Gravity's Rainbow*) the state of being oppressed, but also (in later works such as *Against the Day* and *Vineland*) a social position that fosters salvific concepts such as community, outlawry and in its most extreme capacity, violent resistance. The preterite communities in Pynchon's novels are rarely unified by one particular political or even theological belief, but a heterogeneous collection of disparate and plural beliefs. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the massed preterite are presented as voiceless, an oppressed collective who appear as listless, damned phantoms, 'swimming and

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 31.

drowning, mired and afoot, poor passengers at sundown who have lost the way, blundering across one another's flotsam, the scrapings, the dreary junking of memories – all they have to hold to – churning, mixing, rising, falling. Men overboard and our common debris...' (GR, p. 667)

While I have briefly expressed preterition to be a hopeless state of being, I posit that preterition in Pynchon's work has a dual purpose: to present firstly the oppressive effects of a monocultural and dogmatic religious structure, and secondly to explore preterition as being a vital component of an alternative, pluralist universe. Calvinism itself, as I have already posited, is the sponsor of this hegemonic approach to the world. The multitudinous world that belongs to the preterite is anathema to a doctrine that purports singularity as its world view. As McClure writes,

Monotheism and the emergence and imagination of Calvinism's ferocious Jehovah add a new and dangerous "sphere of reality" to the world and set dangerous supernatural and human energies to work, energies that threaten to destroy diversity itself.²⁰

Such a doctrine of destruction attempts to deny the preterite any cohesion, and denies the postsecular agenda of community, resistance and ethical concern. The Calvinist (and also distinctly *Gnostic*, according to Eddins' work) ruling aggressors in *Gravity's Rainbow* represent the 'narrow way'²¹ as McClure puts it, and serve to neuter the preterite from forming any lasting and coherent sense of communal life that does not fit into their dogmatic agenda. The elect themselves are portrayed as demonic and shadowy figures, promoting this singular orthodoxy, and being the sponsors of the secular obsessions with scientism; namely the promotion of a cosmology which is

²⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

²¹ Ibid, p. 46.

rational, logical and ultimately open to analysis, whereas the preterite in opposition display a trend towards the irrational, the magical and the mysterious.

A meta-narrative emerges from this conflict between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, where a culture invested in death, entropy and stasis becomes increasingly challenged by a resistant culture (a preterite culture) that posits the valorisation of life, renewal and chaos. Among many other conceptual conflicts in the texts, a fundamental struggle between life and death becomes one of Pynchon's strongest and most sustained themes.

The Growing Power of Resistance

Death as a final, non-renewing process, features everywhere in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a topic that has been best discussed in William Plater's *The Grim Phoenix*, but it is worth briefly mentioning here to establish the precise relationship between the elect and preterite motifs in Pynchon's work. The principle elect antagonist in the novel is Dominus Blicero, a Nazi rocket engineer who, while providing an explicit reference to the career of Wernher von Braun, becomes the *Gnostic* mystic priest of the rocket, a 'local deity' (*GR*, p. 485). To the Herero his name reminds them of *Blicker*, 'the nickname the early Germans gave to Death. They saw him white, bleaching and blankness.' (*GR*, p. 323) Blicero's narrative sees him in the process of reaching Ur-Heimat, 'a white land,' (*GR*, p. 485) that seems to be a lifeless lunar landscape, that posits an ascetic retreat from a living, multitudinous Earth. Blicero becomes the exemplar of the orthodoxy; his identity, straddling both the scientific and the mystical, becomes that of a Rocket-priest who creates 'an evil Rocket for the world's suicide.' (*GR*, p. 726) Blicero's mechanical angel of death adds eschatological meaning to the

secular narrative of rocketry; the later inventions it spawned such as ICBMs and the Cold War paranoia of nuclear war. Through this, Pynchon suggests that the injustices and brutality of the modern age – mechanised war, threats of massive annihilation, and the very real possibility of the destruction of the planet – are keenly rooted in the ascetic orthodoxies of Gnosticism and Calvinism.

Blicero is not the only example of the orthodoxy's preoccupation with the finality of death, and how the secular world is blended with this thanatoid drive that Pynchon gives Calvinist and Gnostic dogma. Capitalism and industrialisation are also tools in this 'mission to promote death.' (*GR*, p. 720) Here we see the beginnings of Pynchon's ecological ethic, as industry and Imperialism (synonymous forces in Pynchon's work) are depicted as destructive forces, a defiler of an – admittedly romanticised – natural order:

This is the kind of sunset you hardly see any more, a 19th century wilderness sunset, a few of which get set down, approximated, on canvas, landscapes of the American West by artists nobody has ever heard of, when the land was still free and eye innocent, and the presence of the Creator much more direct. Here it thunders now over the Mediterranean, high and lonely, this anachronism in primal red, in yellow purer than can be found anywhere today, a purity *begging to be polluted*... of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into these virgin sunsets to penetrate and foul? (*GR*, p. 215, emphasis added)

This conflict between a pre-lapsarian and edenic space where death is not a present force, and the ruinous encroachment of 'empire' has its roots in the biblically sanctioned dominion of man over nature, a divine prerogative that Max Weber claims is present in the protestant drive that developed into Capitalism. 'Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'²² Indeed, Pynchon

²² King James Bible, Genesis 1:26.

paraphrases this scriptural passage, situating it as the *counteraction* to the chaos of nature: 'an overpeaking of life so clangourous and mad, such a green corona about Earth's body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion.' (*GR*, p. 720)

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this dominion transpires as crass exploitation and even a zealous hatred, the 'life so clangourous' is transformed into 'coal-tar [...] the very substance of death.' (*GR*, p. 166) The concept of the Earth being an aggregate of life, diversity and energy is anathema to the orthodoxy as its composite doctrines all promote the sovereignty of mankind ('power and grandeur'²³) and thus cannot abide any thought of the world as a primal power *divorced* from man's domain. In order to maintain this sovereign position, man must only 'look at it dead' in order to 'hold down the green uprising.' (*GR*, p. 720)

Industry as a product of human progress is used to create Pynchon's landscapes of death. Smokestacks churn up the earth, showering the surface world with the buried dead in the form of these 'coal-tars', and thus increase the hold of this 'death-culture'. Indeed, when Pynchon discusses industry in *Gravity's Rainbow* his prose becomes more apocalyptic, and less pastoral. The sun becomes 'an enormous gas ruin,' (*GR*, p. 26) 'industrial smoke' is twinned with 'street excrement' and 'windowless warrens,' (*GR*, p. 46) and smokestacks fan 'the waste of original waste over greater and greater masses of the city.' (*GR*, p. 166) These visions of an industrialised Europe tie into Pynchon's emergent interest in the importance of ecology, and are also inseparable from the Gnostic and protestant theologies that paved the way for the dominance of industrial capitalism. By engaging with this socio-historical interplay between secularism and

²³ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 12.

religion (through Horkheimer, Adorno and Weber in chapter one), I aim to show how Pynchon grafts theological resonances onto these fundamentalist, monolithic powers.

In 2006's *Against the Day*, Pynchon continues this particular metanarrative from *Gravity's Rainbow*, and revisits the dichotomy between capitalism and a sentient Earth. While *Gravity's Rainbow* characterises nature firmly as the oppressed that offers slim and marginal glimmers of transcendence and salvation for the preterite community, *Against the Day* situates the 'preterite' Earth in a state of violent uprising, marrying it to the novel's anarchist themes and historical motifs, and exploring the 'green uprising' (*GR*, p. 720) in a more vital and militant style.

Here the ecology of the Earth is less the accepting and friendly zone of retreat, and more a place of primordial violence that acts in resistance against the emergent capitalism of the nineteenth century. Here animism becomes a fully-fledged counterforce to the orthodoxy, and Pynchon's previous, largely Eurocentric,²⁴ portrayal of the natural world is jettisoned for a wider, more global, understanding of worldly animistic spirituality. No longer is ecological resistance figured through Western images of Teutonic folklore (Slothrop's 'Tannhäuserism') and classical allusion (I am referencing here of course Eddins' work on the Orphic material in *Gravity's Rainbow*) but instead through more esoteric spiritual modes like Siberian shamanism and Norse mythology; theological frameworks that are distanced both ideologically and geographically from the orthodox religious trends of the capitalist West. Such 'world spiritualities' (as I will call these for now) are not new to Pynchon. We have seen him previously work consistently with Herero animism in both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *V.* (as

²⁴ While I claim here that Pynchon's early theological content is largely Eurocentric, the notable exception to this is the material on the Herero and Schwarzkommandos in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which offers up animistic spiritual systems from Bantu and Herero culture. However, this is handled through a European framework, expressing both the submission of world cultures into the European model, and the inherent European fear of 'outsider' spiritualities. This is engaged with in detail in chapter three.

well as focus on Africanism in *Mason & Dixon*), where an animist system works against the orthodoxy by their sheer incompatibility. It is this material that Pynchon builds on in the more actively aggressive animism at work in *Against the Day*. I will not dwell much on the Herero content of Pynchon's work at this juncture, as I will undertake an extensive examination of it later in this thesis. Suffice to say for now that the animist spiritualities of the world are a persistent concern across the novels, one that is being constantly re-addressed and reworked in Pynchon's evolving interest in avenues of resistance and liberation.

Resistance is given a more violent capacity in *Against the Day*. Primordial monsters harass railroad workers in Switzerland, militant gnomes attack sojourners to a particularly fin-de-siècle 'hollow Earth', the deserts of America become (almost literal) landscapes of Hell and a Lovecraftian horror from the Arctic lays siege to a city in a passage that makes strong allusions to the 9/11 attacks. The Earth itself in the novel seems to be actively and violently responding to the encroachment upon it by Western orthodoxy: it is a 'wide-open human mouth, mortal, crying, screaming, calling out, calling back.' (*AtD*, p. 128) It is portrayed as a preterite entity in itself, as having some sentience, and (seemingly in agony due to the machinations of an industrial age) suggests both a more considered approach to 'the Earth and its preciousness.'²⁵

This primordial anger bleeds into the novel's main theme of anarchist action against the onset of Capitalism. Kathryn Hume agrees, claiming that Pynchon uses religion as a resistant tool towards "a Luddite, anarchist program to subvert the capitalist world."²⁶ The postsecular politics of *Against the Day* no longer expound 'the

²⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁶ Kathryn Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*', *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 185.

valorisation of desertion, retreat, and loosely articulated communities'²⁷ that McClure speaks of, and instead grants the fury of the anarchist movement an alliance with the Earth itself. This allows Pynchon to sympathise with the preterite position that leads to terrorism, without ever valorising terrorist acts.

A close reading of *Against the Day* provides a more focused and evolved sense of postsecularism than McClure achieves in his brief analysis. McClure's communities are more akin to the *Zone of Gravity's Rainbow*, where salvific spaces are present, but ultimately are transitory and doomed to collapse. In *Against the Day*, we are privy to postsecular struggle on a much larger scale. Resistance in this novel is transmitted from distant primordial pasts, a preterite tradition that is parallel to secular history and manifests itself as a violent and often malign force. Resistant power is no longer a small-scale struggle, but instead has a much larger scope that reacts against modernity, industry and an abuse of the ecological.

The anarchists thus become the channellers of this menacing power, being a part of the 'besieged Earth' by the nature of their professions – miners, dynamiters and railroad workers linked by their labour to the Earth itself, and Pynchon painstakingly portrays the history of the anarchist struggle. However, while Pynchon introduces the inhuman force of the Earth itself in opposition to control, and combines this with the social history of anarchism, he never endorses brute violence, and instead still remains 'attuned to the real human cost of such a stance.'²⁸ We see the anarchist preacher Moss Gatlin calling for the violent death of the bourgeoisie, but find more serious salvific

²⁷ John McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 22.

²⁸ Graham Benton. 'Daydreams and Dynamite', *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.205.

power in community, family and an ethical approach 'where people care for each other in an unstructured, imperfect, but authentic fashion.'²⁹

The three-way love affair between Reef, Yashmeen and Cyprian reflects Pynchon's serious engagement with small, vital community living, as well as positing a functional and perhaps salvific unorthodoxy that rejects the stuffy order of Western propriety, and offers more inclusive and dynamic approaches to family and community. These moments suggest not a solution to this war between the Earth and its capitalist aggressors, but a degree of hope and liberating space on a smaller scale, what McClure calls the 'refusal to make the larger promises identified with popular religious rhetoric.'³⁰ This shows Pynchon's modes of resistance as constantly contracting and expanding considerations. He explores resistance as a grand historical narrative where anarchists and the Earth itself enter a violent struggle with the secular, but in turn critiques it by honing in small scale communities, ethical concerns and the redemptive quality of interpersonal relationships amidst such violence.

Another expansive theme in *Against the Day* is how technology is given space within preterite world. In this thesis I will present the concept of 'heterodox technology', a postsecular take on science where the scientific does not hold to a singular, secular version of truth, and the technological maintains a pluralist stance that denounces the secular claim on 'a complete and authoritative representation of the real'³¹. Instead technology is given a pluralist, spiritual capacity. Such a coupling of the religious with the scientific is obviously not a new phenomenon in Pynchon's work, but in *Against the Day* the relationship is up-ended. While in *Gravity's Rainbow* the destructive and violent properties of wartime and post-war scientific focus are given a religious

²⁹ John McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 57.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 13.

³¹ Ibid, p. 5.

backbone, Pynchon is now allowing the scientific to offer branching possibilities. While Blicero blends the secular world of engineering and physics with the oppressive doctrines of Calvinism and Gnosticism, historical figures such as Nikola Tesla, portrayed as a preterite scientist working against the master control system, opens up the pluralist world to a different approach to science. For instance, Tesla's work is shown as resistant to Capitalism via his invention of the 'World System', a method 'for producing huge amounts of electrical power that anyone can tap into for free.' (*AtD*, p. 33) Such a system is anathema to Capitalism, providing an anarchic and syndicalist re-distribution of power. Tesla's World System is of course denied by the novel's villain, Scarsdale Vibe, claiming it to be a weapon that will destroy 'the very nature of exchange.' (*AtD*, p. 34) Like all postsecular entities, this heterodox technology opens up alternative routes and diverging paths that allow the technological to act in ways irrational to the orthodoxy, and therefore provide resistant options. It does not destroy "exchange," but instead posits other methods of interaction and exchange that work in resistance to capitalist and orthodox models. These particular exchange methods will be explored in detail in chapter three.

There are plenty of the other examples of the blending of science and preterite spiritualities in *Against the Day* that I will engage with. The anarchist sympathiser Merle Rideout explores an alchemical and hermetic approach to early cinema; mundane machineries such as the telephone hold magical and psychic properties; the technological futurism of the World Fair is punctuated with shows from a cosmopolitan array of animists and shamans from across the globe; and the anarchist weapon of choice – dynamite – takes on powers of precognition and teleportation. All these forays into the playful uncanniness of Pynchon's magical technology push us to consider the technological *outside* of the secular and situate it as part of a resistant and mutable

spiritual world. Pynchon uses this to show us that the singular world-view, as Kathryn Hume states, has ‘blinded us to the ease with which a non-realistic world accommodates religious concepts of reality.’³² So instead of maintaining the view that the technological acts as the handmaiden of these monolithic power structures, Pynchon undermines this by creating a counter-technology that both fits into and reflects the communal, ethical and ecological values of postsecularism.

While *Against the Day* follows the spiritual framework of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, unearths the discourse of this older text and provides it with a fresher, more vital and political edge, *Vineland* – appearing almost equidistant between these two encyclopaedic works – explores the practical functionality of postsecular communities in a way that can appear unique to itself. While *Gravity’s Rainbow* posits a secular world created by the sweeping socio-historical effects of Calvinism and Gnosticism, *Vineland*, in the tradition of Pynchon expanding and contracting his spiritual discourse, moves away from a macrocosmic global resistance, and instead looks in detail at personal and small-scale communal methods of resistance.

While finishing this thesis with *Vineland* seems rather idiosyncratic, I wish to end my focus on this novel because it is this small-scale reduction that holds most of Pynchon’s serious take on resistance. While *Against the Day* revisits *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s scope, *Vineland* exists as a focused look at spiritual resistance, both in it being geographically centred in one location and playing out in one time period, and its tighter look at particular spiritual systems. *Vineland* is, at its core, a novel that engages with resistance proper, professing it as a disciplined, sustained, ethical and deeply spiritual endeavour. This approach is indeed present in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Against*

³² Kathryn Hume, ‘The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*.’ p.184.

the Day, but here it is stripped of the global and historical concerns of those novels and allowed to show a postsecular way of life as being sustainable and functional.

While *Against the Day* and *Gravity's Rainbow* address a plethora of religious systems under the banner of preterite spiritualities, *Vineland* dissects the notion of a heterogeneous and sprawling approach to spirituality, showing Pynchon's double quality. While other novels profess to the virtues of a pluralist spiritualism, *Vineland* critiques such a scatter-shot consumption of spiritual systems (making the novel somewhat of an interesting anomaly) by engaging with a movement that practised such an approach: the New Age movement. Pynchon uses the New Age to reconsider pluralism, or more accurately a thoughtless approach to pluralism that easily transforms into commercialism, co-option and misappropriation. The inclusive nature of the New Age is posited as having no salvific qualities, and comes across in the novel as insincere, cynical and vapid. The New Age becomes the conduit for secular usurpations of spiritualities and, as McClure writes, 'enables Pynchon to dramatize the spiritual aridity of mass secular culture and to ridicule aspects of New Age alternatives.'³³

Vineland's Californian setting allows it to closely engage with the history of the New Age Movement. Pynchon establishes satirical counterparts for real aspects of the New Age, from the hippy retreat of Esalen to the creation of enterprising ventures that combined esoteric spirituality with mundane business such as pizza parlours and profit-driven self-help gurus. Throughout the novel he creates ridiculous and hyperbolic examples of popular New Ageism. He veers between satire and melancholy when discussing the naïve transcendentalism of hippy culture, a spirituality made popular by Beat Generation writers and popular figures like the philosopher D.T. Suzuki, who tutored many of the Beats in Zen. He depicts a conflict between the immense

³³ John McClure, *Partial Faiths*. pp.50-51.

commercial popularity of these spiritualities and the core of the theological systems that they are rooted in. He both derides the quick-fix religious mode of post-sixties California, and blames the idealism of the hippies for their failure. At the heart of *Vineland* lies - despite the capitalist co-option of these world religions - 'the survival strategy of retreat and muted resistance'³⁴ that counters the profitable and arid New Age culture that thrived in twentieth-century California.

In the presence of such a thoughtless and damaging pluralism, Pynchon seems to be arguing that creating a true sense of spiritual resistance requires a disciplined and ethical approach to religious systems. *Vineland* strongly rejects the notion of large-scale redemptive moments in favour of smaller, more sustained work that maintains communities, reinforces individual relationships (family or otherwise) and endorses a strict sense of ecological and social responsibility. The promise of an otherworldly departure becomes the domain of the fake world of the New Age, a simulation of a transcendence that offers little practical function other than positing a brief escape from a quotidian and oppressed world. This asceticism becomes instead the doctrine of a *simulated* religious discourse that belongs to a theological system long usurped by the force that is that very oppressor. What is left, and it is this that Pynchon defines as having true spiritual and political value, is the establishment of ethical communities on the periphery of society, 'scuffling and scraping for everything we get.' (VL, p. 108) McClure agrees that Pynchon jettisons his previous ideas about transcendence and *Vineland's* protagonists adopt a more immediate spiritual path: 'he shifts his emphasis, within his treatment of the spiritual from improvisatory and ecstatic forms of experience, to more disciplined and unspectacular practices.'³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, p. 49.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 49.

It is the concept of disciplined religious observance and hard-won ground that make *Vineland* the most compelling of Pynchon's novels in regards to how spiritual resistance functions. While the political aspects of resistance take a more frontal position in the novel, a postsecular discourse does not evaporate, as theology is still figured as a viable and constructive means of carrying out such liberation. Indeed, McClure states that 'effective resistance to these forces [capitalism, Reaganism, commercialism] depends as much on the nurturing of spiritual perspectives and practices as on secular forms of political analysis and intervention.' Indeed, spiritual structures that have been appropriated by Pynchon's subversive portrayal of the New Age are subverted back by the preterite communities. The Kunoichi Sisterhood, offering affordable slices of Zen Buddhism to tourists, use the shallowest aspects of the New Age to maintain their retreat as a bastion of a disciplined and deeply ethical Buddhist doctrine that serves specifically to protect, and be a refuge for, the preterite. This concept of 'winning back' the spiritual dynamism that the New Age co-option repressed in its crass commercialisation of religious practice is key to how preterite religion is constructed. The preterite of *Vineland* act as spiritual 'scavengers', sifting through the profanity of a capital-run religious system seeking genuine spiritual power. This phenomenon is concisely summed up by McClure: '*Vineland* not only renders the larger world of contemporary capitalist culture, but it also sings its tunes, invokes its sacred texts, and goes looking within it for sources of resistance.'³⁶

It is self-sacrifice and disciplined ethical thinking that matters to Pynchon's religious discourse in *Vineland*, religious practices that encourage a 'kind of disciplined inner work.'³⁷ The concept of preterite communities disembarking from the world is

³⁶ Ibid, p. 50.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

lessened, in place of a spiritual sense of responsibility. The preterite in the novel are heavily invested in a particularly Zen-infused concept of karma, and see their role as actively addressing and re-balancing the karmic balance of the world, set out of kilter by the ever-present master control system that exists across the corpus. Karmic systems also manifest themselves via the ubiquitous Thanatoids, ghostly figures who resemble the put upon and repressed preterite of *Gravity's Rainbow*: deathly, lost and embittered. By portraying the personal fallout caused by an immoral, aggressive orthodox power structure, Pynchon's preterite spirituality in *Vineland* is focused on the re-balancing of such injustices. The characters DL and Takeshi embark on a business model for 'karmic readjustment' that at first seems like another commercialised product, and it is, albeit a 'commercially contaminated spiritual enterprise that still produces results.' It is, however, not the business that produces results, but the relationship of responsibility and care that exists between DL and Takeshi that has the true salvific quality. Resistance in *Vineland* is inflected with a moral core that sets it apart from the violence of the master control system. The militant nature of the ninjettes is tempered by a deep sense of care as they embark to find some spiritual centre in the selfless act of aiding the vulnerable preterite. They act as traditional mythological outlaws, a status Pynchon defines in his introduction to Jim Dodge's novel *Stone Junction*, where outlaws are 'agents of the poor' that exist in a dichotomy 'between outlaws and evil-doers, outlawry and sin.'³⁸ By portraying the preterite as heroic, active agents that pursue practical methods of resistance, Pynchon grants them a powerful status, the concept of freedom fighters that conduct their work via a spiritual system of disciplined ethics. In this sense, *Vineland* offers us a condensed form of legitimate resistance that posits that it must be

³⁸ Thomas Pynchon, 'Introduction to *Stone Junction*', in *Stone Junction* by Jim Dodge, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), p. ix.

achieved locally, with a considered approach to spiritual systems that promote the continued existence of postsecular communities. The novel does not provide a global solution for the eradication of the master control system, but instead provides a blueprint for what is required to exist exterior to it. This pragmatic approach to spiritual resistance shows Pynchon at his most serious, dropping for a moment his interest in a larger, more historically grand narrative of the conflict between control and resistance, and understanding the true cost and sacrifice of postsecular living.

This is where my position deviates from McClure. *Partial Faiths* does indeed present a compelling reading of how preterite spirituality can be understood in Pynchon, but it becomes limited for two reasons. The first is a practical concern, in that *Partial Faiths* addressed a wide selection of writers, and by doing so lacks a sustained reading of Pynchon's work. McClure constructs a general form for the postsecular (derived initially from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*) which he applies across his work. This in turn suggests that all the postsecular elements of Pynchon exist in one form, but as I have briefly shown here – and will do across the thesis – Pynchon's postsecularism takes on a variety of changing and developing forms. *Gravity's Rainbow* posits a postsecularism that includes both resistance *and* control by showing a religiously saturated master control system. The monolithic theological structures of the novel do not merely remain fixed in opposition, but shift and mutate into postsecular resistance, and the boundaries between orthodox systems and resistant ones are blurred and constantly relocated. *Against the Day* does not hold to McClure's position that postsecular resistance is passive and non-violent, in its portrayal of violent acts and political activism. *Vineland* resists notions of postsecular spaces being transient and without coherent agenda, where communities attempt to sustain their survival and practice a devotion to strict ethical structures. Overall, how I am attempting to build on

and push forward McClure's ideas, lies in Pynchon's creation of alternative preterite histories. While McClure sees postsecular uprisings as temporary, transient things, I see Pynchon's postsecularism as tapping into a hidden preterite history that has run parallel to secular history and been consistently present. He is interested in genealogies within the preterite masses, from Slothrop's connection to his heretic ancestor William, to the animistic revival of a chaotic, living planet, to the anarchist Traverse dynasty in *Against the Day* that are in turn ancestors of the Traverses in *Vineland* (they figuratively "traverse" this preterite tradition). Transmission from this consistently present counter-history is integral to how spiritual power is considered. Spiritualities that spring out of nowhere without paying their dues to this preterite tradition have no real power, such as the New Age, which tears spiritual systems from their roots, instead of engaging with their histories as a whole. What I aim to achieve with this thesis is to show that genuine preterite resistance draws from this "background noise" and that resistance is an ever-present force in Pynchon's work. It is how it manifests itself in various different forms that charts the evolution of resistance in the novels.

CHAPTER ONE

Calvinism and Modes of Control in

Gravity's Rainbow.

Calvinism, paths already trodden.

Of all the thematic devices across Pynchon's corpus, it is perhaps paranoia that is most familiar to his readers and critics. At the core of the novels (most prominent, as I shall investigate, in *Gravity's Rainbow*) are agencies of manipulation, surveillance, plots with whose significance is so entwined and interred within other plots that they resist unearthing. A common trope often in critical work on paranoia (mainly in the first wave of criticism by the likes of Mendelson, Cowart and Sanders) in Pynchon's work is the notion that paranoia is not a secular occurrence, in fact something very attuned to a critical discussion of theology and spirituality. As Scott Sanders claims in his essay 'Pynchon's Paranoid History', 'God is the original conspiracy theory.'³⁹ Sanders is referring to Pynchon's consistent engagement with Calvinism, relaying its dogmatic assumption that God is the arbitrator of all existence, that 'every particle of dust, every act, every thought, every creature is governed by the will of God, and yields clues to the divine plan.'⁴⁰ The Calvinistic notion of a grand arbitrator governing existence in this way provides *Gravity's Rainbow* with its structure, with characters and events becoming figurations and representations of the theological ideas, both dealing critically with the

³⁹ Scott Sanders, 'Pynchon's Paranoid History', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 21/2 (1975), 177-192, p. 177.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 177.

consequences of such a cosmology, and equally the consequences of the opposite: a direction-less and unguided universe.

The basics of Calvinistic predetermination denies the existence of free will, and whether one is Elect (saved) or Preterite (damned) is not based on any striving or action on the practitioner's part to become redeemed, but on a divinely pre-conceived decision on the fate and worth of your soul. Karl Barth describes the consequence of this notion in *The Theology of Calvin*:

Those who are obedient should never forget for a moment that they are not the recipients of grace because they are obedient, but obedient because they are the recipients of grace. They may and must obey, but they have no rights because they do so. Those who are obedient might have been condemned to disobedience. This is the heart of Calvin's doctrine of predetermination.⁴¹

It is this sense of unavoidable damnation (and also by the same token, unavoidable redemption) that shapes the cosmology of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and suggests a tone of control and oppression. From the opening pages of that novel we are greeted with the impact of a V2 rocket, and a dream of an evacuation of a mass of people, the 'second sheep' (*GR*, p. 3). The concept of this "mass" in terms of it being an anonymous one, is integral for understanding the relationship between the "one" and the "multitude", the elect and the preterite, exhibited in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The philosopher Michel Serres in his book *Genesis* explores such a relationship. The loss of identity of the human who finds himself within a 'mass', is expressed thus:

...the public man is unrecognisable; he is no longer a particular person. He is now only an operator for mimicry. He erases from his body every angle of

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *The Theology of Calvin*, Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 117-118.

singularity, he is moulded of smooth planes [...] he is a concept, he is a class, he is a quasi-object.⁴²

Calvinism has this transformative effect on humanity, reverting them to faceless ideas, figures that form a mass rather than personal, individual identities. The sense that these people are God-forsaken is emphasised in the architecture of the city setting during the evacuation: ‘they go in under archways, secret entrances of rotted concrete that only looked like loops of an underpass... certain trestles of blackened wood have moved slowly overhead, and the smells begun of coal from days far in the past...’ (*GR*, p. 3) The refuse they encounter on their passage is loaded with meaning. The trestles resembling a dead foundation, a root system that has become blackened and ruinous. The coal invokes references to compacted life, fossils, carbonised and crushed under a great pressure only to emerge with functionality as fuel (a reference that is picked up later in the novel, as I will return to in detail). The preterite are doomed to descend, to ‘knot into’ a forgotten history, a prehistory of discarded miscellany and trash. They are passed over, and thus their worth is deemed forgettable, and their function negated. There is an engagement with a modernist sensibility here too, as T.S. Eliot’s ‘Unreal City’ in *The Waste Land* witnesses a procession of the dead along London Bridge, where ‘each man fixed his eyes before his feet.’⁴³ The hopeless parade of the dead in both texts contains a common purpose, the expression of the homogenization of a mass of identity-less people – “public men.” The lifeless and numb denizens of Eliot’s London share the same living death as the descending Preterite of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

In the fashion that Eliot paints a ruined and classical London, Pynchon’s preterite souls descend into an equally declined city. The underpasses give way to wood, which

⁴² Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Genevieve James & James Nielson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 28.

⁴³ T.S. Eliot, ‘The Wasteland’, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), pp. 51-69. l. 65.

in turn gives way to coal; the preterite are not only moving through the city, but moving *temporally*, being immersed into history, or more accurately, being *away from* history – becoming buried beneath a visibly mass-conscious notion of remembered history. They are being crushed under layers of new refuse, compressed by ‘a terrible mass above’ (*GR*, p. 7) into compacted remains, carbonised and crushed into a dead substance that can be used only as fuel (see below). This sense of things becoming condensed and crushed via gravity comes up often in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and forms Pynchon’s main argument about the relationship between History and waste, of Time and Gravity. Pynchon equates the forming of coal with the forming of History, the perpetual deepening of ageing material, ‘epoch upon epoch, city on top of ruined city.’ (*GR*, p. 167) In a lecture on industry spoken by the ghost of Walter Rathenau during a Nazi séance within the novel, Pynchon equates coal with the Preterite masses, and the steel forged by the coal furnaces as the elect.

Imagine coal, down in the earth, dead black, no light, the very substance of death. Death ancient, prehistoric, species *we will never see again*. Growing older, blacker, deeper, in layers of perpetual night. Above ground, the steel rolls out fiery, bright. But to make steel, the coal tars, darker and heavier, must be taken from the original coal. Earth’s excrement, purged out for the ennoblement of shining steel. Passed over. (*GR*, p. 166)

Those given grace are taken from the preterite, the dead, and the preterite are used and cast aside. Here we can see a light and dark motif used often in Pynchon’s work for a myriad of purposes, but here it signifies the light steel of Grace and election versus the black, carbonised darkness of preterition, the damned. This is reminiscent of Serres’ image of Aphrodite, emerging from the anonymous, violent mass of the ocean. To quote Serres, ‘we turn away from the waves to admire the wave-born.’⁴⁴ He perceives the

⁴⁴ Serres, *Genesis*, p. 25.

world as a chaotic background noise, and social structures can only ignore this mass, and draw out those who appear separate from it.

Those drawn from the waste, as Pynchon says 'Earth's excrement', are given value, identity, place and power, whereas the rest are doomed to die, unknown, powerless, impotent, and fit only to form the strata of dust that forms History. This dichotomy between an orthodox historical narrative and a wider lost 'folk-history' underpins an analogous concern in Walter Benjamin's theoretical view on history. He perceives history as a potentially violent act that turns it into an unavoidably biased mechanism, something that scores a narrative of progression through history at great cost to its totality. He writes;

A Klee painting called 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁴⁵

Pynchon refers to the 'storm of progress' in *Gravity's Rainbow* as the driving force of war and the demonic forces that promote it. Whereas the angel of history desires to linger in the present, the hostile forces of progression, death and in Pynchon's own vernacular – entropic collapse into chaos and meaninglessness - render this impossible.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, Trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1995), p. 249.

This notion of a lost preterite history (and by the same token, ‘prehistory’) as a mass of indefinable, unordered history forms the backbone of *Genesis*. The sea functions as a metaphor for the chaotic form this history manifests as, and this provides a model for the larger part of Serres’ ideas, of what he calls *noise*. This *noise* consists of the rumblings that occur behind life, sets of yet to be connected signifiers. ‘This sea noise is the originating rumour and murmuring, the original hate.’⁴⁶ The preterite people of *Gravity’s Rainbow* also exist as a background rumble, a unity in itself that has no identity or definition – it is just *noise* – and should it obtain meaning, should it elevate itself to the position of a sign (or in terms of Calvinism, obtain Grace) it will transfigure into something else. For as Serres points out,

Noise cannot be a phenomenon; every phenomenon is separated from it, a silhouette on a backdrop, like the beacon against the fog, as every message, every cry, every call, every signal must be separated from the hubbub that occupies silence, in order to be, to be perceived, to be known, to be exchanged.⁴⁷

This rings true of the preterite in the novel. They are defined by the fact that they are ignored by an orthodox historical narrative, kept on the edge of what is considered to be ‘solid’. There is no exchange between them and the elect, even less between them and the Calvinistic notion of the divine. They are doomed to be ‘passed over’ by God and by history (these two concepts are interlinked into one entity in this case, those given divine import are included into a historical narrative and those who are not are relegated out of it), to exist purely as a indefinable ‘white noise’ that exists beyond the boundary of any concrete dialogue with the mainstream. The space that they inhabit is depicted as an alien, ‘ghost’ world, distanced from any sense of an ordered, rational

⁴⁶ Serres, *Genesis*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 13.

world. Not even rats appear to live in this dead land, but 'only their ghosts, still as cave paintings, fixed stubborn and luminous to the walls.' (*GR*, p. 4)

Pynchon's set-up of the preterite as an anonymous mass descending beyond an inclusion into history in the novel's illuminating introduction is followed by a scene of Pirate Prentice watching the morning unfold from the roof of his apartment. This transition is telling in its heavy juxtaposition of the elect and the preterite. Pirate is singular and has a named identity, as opposed to the blackened and faceless crowd of evacuees that make up any other entity we have come across so far in *Gravity's Rainbow*. He is also spatially opposed, being elevated on the rooftops instead of drifting beneath the city. He is *above*, in isolation, as opposed to *beneath*. Pirate is motionless, observing, in a post-Bacchanalian haze instead of perpetually descending, and passing out of a conscious existence. He is resilient to becoming preterite and lost amidst this oppressive mass of history, being an agent of it as opposed to a victim. Pirate is also privy to the light that is denied to the preterite. 'But there is already light.' (*GR*, p. 4) The character of Pirate at this point is representative of the Elect by his contrast to the prior manifestation of the preterite masses, a figure emblematic of an inclusion into a Calvinistic notion of a 'divine plan'. Pirate's election and solitary concrete identity mirrors Serres's relationship between noise and phenomenon. Pirate's image here *is* the phenomenon, plucked from the *sea noise* and takes form as this solid, fully identified individual. Serres states that "formed phenomenal information gets free from the chaotic background noise, the knowable and the known are born from that unknown."⁴⁸ Pirate becomes Serres' *Aphrodite*, emerging from the chaos of the sea. He is singularity; his naming allows him some authority and position within the narrative. Pirate's differentiation from the shuffling masses beneath the city grants him some grace that is

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

denied to the preterite. While this polarised introduction sets up very vividly the dichotomy, the novel continues to explore the consequences of preterition and election, beyond a simple discourse between ‘lost’ entities and ‘saved’ entities.

Despite the apparent ‘doom’ of the preterite depicted in the hellish descent in the introduction to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon’s preterite are not impotent; they are restricted by their ‘lost’ status, but instead equipped by it with their own set of resistant tools. In *Genesis*, Serres speaks of ‘hatred’ and ‘violence’ behind the background noise. This becomes most coherent in his meditations on a rugby game. ‘This ceremony [the rugby game] is a religious one, by religion I mean the thing forever forgotten, barbaric, wild things, for which we may have lost the words and which come to us from far away, without a text.’⁴⁹ In this context, the preterite are ‘textless’, insofar that to have a text provides meaning and thus election. The preterite are primal in their manifestation, a force of will instead of a structured coherence. Like the hatred Serres professes to be at the heart of the world, encased in this chaotic tumult, the preterite begin to form into a resistance, a resistance born out of being ignored, about being side-lined by an emphasis on singularity. Part of this is the conceptual mobility of the mass, a conscience level of resistance against categorisation and a divinely sanctioned hierarchical way of ordering the world.

An example of this within *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the Schwarzkommandos, and their transient ontology (I will be addressing this in greater detail in chapter three). Their leader Oberst Enzian does indeed contemplate his position within an empirical, singular world view: ‘What Enzian wants to create will have no history.’ (*GR*, p. 319) Serres notes this transitory, slippery nature of the undefined masses.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 55.

Multitude goes from the plebeian state to the state of legion, from Quirinus to Mars, from one classification to the other, through an intermediary state that is perhaps primitive. Concepts, units subsuming multiplicities follow one another allowing glimpses of the underlying noise.⁵⁰

Not only do the Schwarzkommandos feel a sense of immediate indeterminacy, they also lament the existential problems surrounding their reality. The Schwarzkommandos live in abandoned mineshafts and deep cave communities beneath the Zone. The Zone-Hereros seem to be involved in a form of death-worship, much more orientated to loss and acceptance of extinction than death as a medium of redemption and transcendence. As Pynchon writes, the Zone-Hereros are ‘sold on suicide’ (*GR*, p. 321), and Enzian is aware that the fate of him and his people is to decline, to die, to reach the enigmatic and ever so dreadfully static Zero. ‘To allow the tribal past to disperse, all memories ought to be public record, there’s no point in preserving history with that Final Zero to look forward to...’(*GR*, p.320) The Schwarzkommandos are accepting of their fate, and the exclusion from history that will result from it. As William Plater writes in *The Grim Phoenix*, his critical work on Pynchon and death, ‘The [...] dream of the Final Zero is a total denial of life. It is the colonial policy stripped of all illusion: no transcendence, transformation or transfiguration.’⁵¹ In the Herero Mandala, north represents death, and it is the north that the Schwarzkommandos find themselves, now within their own religious world view already in the underworld. If my Benjaminian model of analysis is correct, and all of the world’s memory is descending at speed into the inevitable strata of historical detritus, it is the Schwarzkommandos who exemplify – and grimly embrace - this rush. The Schwarzkommandos will be covered in further detail later in this thesis.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 86.

⁵¹ William Plater, *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 163.

Capitalism versus Resurrection.

If Calvinism is the ruling theology of the modern world as depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow*, then Capitalism is their vehicle of control. In the novel Pynchon sees Capitalism as an inhibitor to any salvific hope of the preterite, as a system that reinforces the hierarchical system of a singular, Calvinistic historical discourse. He references the Ouroboros, the snake that consumes itself as a common depiction of renewal, as an example of a salvific system impeded by capital. Kukulé the German chemist dreams of a serpent:

The Serpent that announces, "The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning," is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to *violate* the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that "productivity" and "earnings" keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate factions showing a profit..." (*GR*, p. 412)

Capitalism causes the breakdown of renewal, a promise of no return, No salvation, echoing the Calvinist promise of 'no salvation for the preterite'⁵² called by Max Weber in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 'the complete elimination of salvation through the church and sacraments.'⁵³ According to Weber, Calvinism finds the concept of the death of the preterite acceptable, and even of the norm: '...everything of the flesh is separated from God by an unbridgeable gulf and *deserves* of Him only eternal death, in so far as He has not decreed otherwise for the glorification of His

⁵² Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), p. 101.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 104-105

Majesty.⁵⁴ (Emphasis added by myself). There is no promise of renewal for the world, only an escape via election. The Ouroboros is fractured. Pynchon finds himself extremely interested in the consequences of the 'Death Theology', and often accuses Puritan Europe of cultivating and exporting a Death Culture. By Death Culture, I refer to the manner in which Calvinism is built upon death, where the end result of humanity is death with a promise of transfiguration. The culture exported offers no transfiguration, merely annihilation. In the Ouroboros section, he likens Calvinist determinism to a speeding vehicle, heading towards a crash. 'Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide' (*GR*, p. 412). Calvinism not only believes in its inevitable end, but welcomes it, be it Preterite death or the everlasting life of election. The Rainer Maria Rilke quote of 'once, only once' (*GR*, p. 413) is masterfully chosen, showing that the Calvinistic world is finite, is on an entropic collapse, and reliant on notions of finality and exhaustion.

This critique leads us into a familiar (and perhaps overworked) element of Pynchon, the framework of entropy, but it is worth exploring how Pynchon works Calvinism into this familiar theme. The Ouroboros is used to represent a closed system (in alchemical circles it represented a state of perfect chemical self-sufficiency, not lost on Pynchon having it appear in the dreams of a chemist) i.e. the World. Capitalism produces waste through production, and this waste becomes the lost energy, the heat-death that is slowly destroying the cycle. But it is not just entropy where this image of Capitalist process of consumption-then-death can be applied.

The Rocket, the single most important and complex symbol of *Gravity's Rainbow* can have the framework thrust upon it. The basic mechanics of rocketry are applicable to Calvinism, the staunch singularity of the Rocket's existence, the fact that it burns all

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 103.

of its fuel until Brenschluss with no reserve or hope for a second try, and its inevitable destruction upon impact with the Earth for which Pynchon invokes Rilkean verse as a metaphor. The rocket becomes a symbol of the closed system, as Plater states in *The Grim Phoenix*: 'He [Pynchon] goes to great lengths to ensure that the Rocket is perceived as the integrating form that is as complete and conclusive as the isolated system.'⁵⁵ With its complete and total heat death and the permanency of its destruction, the Rocket could be read as both a Calvinistic divine force in itself, and also a 'delivery system' for its election/preterition ideology. It is designed to bring death to the masses, to assure death comes to the preterite that lie in its path. This notion is supported by Pynchon's notion that London has been built to accommodate this idea, in that the East End has become the habitat of the poor (traditionally the group deemed preterite by socio-Calvinist thought) because it is closest to the rocket strikes ('all over the rucking *East End*' (*GR*, p. 171)). The Rocket's lifespan is representational of the life of the preterite, as Plater determined: 'A perfect symbol of the continuity between life and death, the Rocket offers both the illusion of its own independent life, all the while promising death.'⁵⁶ The Rocket becomes the tool by which Calvinism is enforced, an 'instrument of death' (*GR*, p. 727) made by the elect that denies resurrection for the preterite by overshadowing them with the inescapable spectre of imminent destruction. The Rocket becomes the figure of this theological concept, the ever-present reminder of the Calvinistic death set aside for the preterite. Pynchon provides a grimly prophetic passage depicting the Rocket's purpose as a silencer of resistance, a deathly method of Calvinistic control:

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 156.

⁵⁶ Plater, *The Grim Phoenix*, p. 157.

But these heretics [Preterite, pockets of resistance, et cetera. The concept of heresy and how it fits into concepts of preterition will be explored later in this thesis] will be sought and the dominion of silence will enlarge as each goes down... they will *all* be sought out. Each will have his personal Rocket. [...] each Rocket will know its intended and hunt him, ride him a green-doped and silent hound, through our World, shining and pointing in the sky at his back, his guardian executioner rushing in, *rushing closer*... (GR, p. 726)

The Rocket is now a perverse play on the concept of a 'guardian angel', an ever-present sword of Damocles that provides an absolute end to those who are preterite. It has been transfigured into an agent of Calvinistic doctrine, but due to the complexity of the relationship between election and preterition in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Rocket can also be appropriated as an image of resistance as well. I will be exploring this doubling of the Rocket later in this thesis.

The doom of Pynchon's narrative is controlled and set into play by these vast plots and machinations orchestrated by unseen agencies. As I have stated, critical opinion has posited where Pynchon places these agencies, most of them drawing parallels to a Calvinistic image of God (Cowart, Seed and Mendelson all support this theory). Following on from this assumption, we thus find Pynchon exploring the nature and consequences of an omnipotent force of control. This exploration forms the basis on Pynchon's Calvinistic analysis – what impact does such a notion have on ideas of freedom, and how does resistance function against such a force. Louis Mackey in his essay 'Paranoia, Pynchon and Preterition', questions the virtues of election: 'for the preterite, this [election] converts to strong the suspicion, bordering on conviction, that "they're out to get me"'.⁵⁷ If the divine plan is an antagonistic form of control in its essence, it is better to be ignored, to be the Preterite. Being outside of God's concern is freedom, and therefore preterition is freedom: 'The innocence of the creatures is in

⁵⁷ Louis Mackey, 'Paranoia, Pynchon and Preterition', *SubStance*, 10/1 (1981), 16-30, p. 17.

inverse proportion to the immortality of the master' (*GR*, p. 241). The more powerful those who control you are, the more doomed you become to their will. The promise of ascension and transcendence to the Elect can be modelled by the parabola of the Rocket. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon uses this metaphor to highlight the hopelessness of election. 'This Ascent will be betrayed to Gravity... The victim in bondage to falling, rises on a promise, a prophecy, of escape.' (*GR*, p. 758) points out Pynchon's potential reversal of Calvinistic intention,⁵⁸ placing the Preterite as the overlooked and therefore free, and the elect as bonded, doomed to crash down from any elevated promise of divinity and become damned. Pynchon thus denies the election itself, by claiming that it will be 'betrayed', as figured in the parabola of the Rocket. The Rocket cannot therefore be seen as an image of elected transcendence, but instead continues in its function as a promise of death.

Mackey makes the case that the virtues of either being Elect or Preterite are linked with Pynchon's response to the function of control within the novel. In a perversion of Calvinist doctrine, to be elect suggest a compliance with such a system of control, and to be preterite suggest a mode of freedom against that very same thing. He writes 'the paranoid's faith – his substance of thing not seen – is: someone's out to get me.'⁵⁹ These senses of paranoia suggest an inherent 'fear' of election, and this notion resonates throughout the novel, as we can see in the 'proverbs for paranoids', a collection of aphorisms spread across the text.⁶⁰ The paranoid is afraid of connections, of the very idea of a controlling, divine plan being in place. While he *is* afraid of his own potential

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶⁰ 1. 'You may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures.' (*GR*, p. 237)

2. 'The innocence of the creatures is in inverse proportion to the immortality of the Master.' (*GR*, p. 241)

3. 'If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers.' (*GR*, p. 251)

4. 'You hide, they seek.' (*GR*, p. 262)

5. 'Paranoids are not paranoid because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations.' (*GR*, p. 292)

preterition, his approaching doom and annihilation, the core of his fear stems from the chance that he just might be, inescapably, elect. The potential of being elect is tempered with a paranoid fear of a divine plan being in place for those chosen.

Tyrone Slothrop's own fear of his election is one of the driving forces of the narrative, following his flight across Europe and into The Zone. This ontological uncertainty positions him as a mirror-image of Tcitcherine, a man whose entire motivation lies in the belief he is chosen to die for his mother country of Russia, but whose avid belief in his elected purpose is shaken by his apparent preterition (which also, interestingly, becomes his salvation as we shall explore later in the thesis). In *Gravity's Rainbow* the concept of 'anti-paranoia', the fear of there being *nothing* at the heart of the universe except chaos becomes apparent, and election becomes a fearful position. Is it better to be controlled in a narrative, structured universe, or be fully free in a universe of no connectivity or meaning? This complex negotiation with election and preterition becomes an ontological tug-of war between the horror of control, versus the terror of a undefined 'non-being'. Slothrop's journey goes so far in analysing this question.

Gravity's Rainbow constantly plays with the question of Slothrop's election, a status that is mired in ambiguity from the outset. In 'Beyond the Zero' he is spied on, chased and drugged, his place in a Calvinist 'great plan' assured by the controlling machinations of the Rocket engineers and the Pavlovians. Slothrop's flight from his pursuers is him himself pursuing the freedom of preterition, marred by the conflicting urges within him to both be free and also desperately to know the nature of the plan arrayed for him. However, much like Oedipa Mass in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the concept is that all is unreal, a fabrication of the individual. In *Lot 49* Oedipa desires for there to be a *real* Tristero, for there to be a definite structure and conspiratorial meaning to the

universe. Reading into this with a theological framework in mind, this can be taken to explain a desire for there to be a God, the existence of this ‘anti-paranoia’, a desperate hope that there is control in the world, whether it comes from a benevolent or malevolent origin. Slothrop’s delusions are indeed from the base fear of preterition, as while terrified of his election, he must convince himself of it as a means to place his identity, an identity governed by his Puritan ancestry. It is this failure to do so that seals his fate – Slothrop’s identity completely collapses and diffuses in the closing. He suffers the same fate as the doomed preterite of the opening chapter, to be dissolved out of history. As Sanders writes, ‘to be passed over, to drop out of all plots, is to lose one’s identity. Isolated from external schemes, character dissolves.’⁶¹

Žižek in *The Neighbour* describes the ontological problem which Slothrop falls victim of. He states that in a secular world it is the bureaucracy that is given the role of the divine, as in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, where the paperwork of the War is positioned as an apparatus of control.

What can be more divine than the traumatic encounter with the bureaucracy at its craziest – when, say, a bureaucrat tells us that, legally, we don’t exist? It is in such encounters that we get a glimpse of another order beyond the mere terrestrial everyday reality.⁶²

Slothrop’s disappearance from reality in the closing of *Gravity’s Rainbow* comes from him breaking away from the systems which pursue and control him. Without the structure providing a channel for him to move along, he loses contact with this secular simulacrum of the divine (as Žižek describes) and is lost, dropped out of any predetermined Calvinistic structure. In an exploration of Kafka, Žižek writes:

⁶¹ Sanders, *Pynchon’s Paranoid History*, p. 186.

⁶² Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santar and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries into Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 165.

The Kafkan Thing is either transcendent, forever eluding our grasp (the Law, the Castle), or a ridiculous object into which the subject is metamorphosed and which we cannot get rid of (like Gregor Samsa, who changes into an insect).⁶³

To apply this to Pynchon's work is to look at the relationship he attributes to the ridiculous and the sublime, the vulgar to the transcendent. Slothrop fails to understand the will of the controlling and invisible forces that drive him along, in the same way Kafka's protagonists find themselves in confusing and incomprehensible systems. Also, Slothrop undergoes certain metamorphoses, from Ian Scuffling the English Journalist to a superhero named Rocketman, to a pink folkloric pig (Plechazunga). Like Kafka's Odradek, a being that has 'no resolution proper; the thing just drags on'⁶⁴, Slothrop loses his identity and his function, and by doing so – again like Odradek – acquires a sort of immortality, or at least an immortality brought about by a perpetual state of ontological uncertainty. Eventually, this 'identity crisis' causes the dissolution of his self entirely, and he falls out of time and space, out of sight of the divine by his sheer lack of determined destination or understandable function. However, to escape death in this way (Slothrop now cannot die, merely surface and disappear again like background noise), to slip out of the consciousness and structure of the world is to Pynchon another form of death, one that is not a salvation. To ascribe a positive salvific meaning to this 'escape' would suggest a powerlessness on the part of the preterite, a suggestion that it is only election that provides an ontological position in the world. As I will uncover throughout this thesis, preterition is not the the dissolution of self, but instead an identity that functions in resistance to the orthodoxy presumed by election.

⁶³ Zizek, *The Neighbour*, p. 164.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 164.

So what we can understand so far from Pynchon's complex discourse with election and preterition in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be expressed *thus*: Election provides the self with an identity, but requires a complicit 'yielding' of oneself to an all-powerful and epistemologically impenetrable power or plan. Preterition can be expressed as freedom from such an inherent control structure by virtue of one being of no function to it, but is doubled with the threat of an ontologically unstable identity, and total exclusion from a historical meta-narrative that manifests as annihilation/death.

In light of this, I must also engage with the facets of election itself. Where Sanders and Mackey highlight the suffering of the elect characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tony Tanner interprets the Calvinistic framework as presenting the elect as something more sinister. Above I have claimed that both election and preterition perpetuate victim-hood of those who fall under either category, but Tanner suggests the elect are less of the victims of Calvinistic imposition, than the 'architects' of it, depicting them more as inhuman manipulators.

Set against the Preterite are the elite, the users and manipulators, those who regard the planet as solely for their satisfaction, the nameless and ubiquitous 'they' who dominate the world of the book. One of the modern malaises Pynchon has diagnosed is that it is possible for a person to feel himself enter a state of preterition.⁶⁵

Here Tanner uses the term 'elite' over elect, differentiating them from any entity in the novel that 'suffers' election. Here we interpret the *elite*-elect as controllers, tyrants and malevolent destructive forces of the Earth. Tanner's analysis suggests that the modern world *itself* is entering a state of preterition, and those in control are inhuman by their hidden and nameless status and *thus* a Calvinistic model of the world is alien and malevolent. By showing Calvinistic duality in such a harsh light Pynchon is

⁶⁵ Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 84.

rejecting the binary of “saved” or “damned” and instead finding salvific space by focusing upon elements of a world that is not shaped by these dual paradigms. The alternatives to this polarisation are mediating spaces, the *zones* that occupy the gaps between preterition and election. It is these resistant theologies that we still explore in great detail in future chapters. Pynchon is not trying to position being in a preterite state as a salvific state *within* the terms of Calvinism (that would be an impossibility, due to the ontological problems described earlier), but instead explores amidst the detritus left by Calvinist doctrine for an alternative and resistant structure and meaning. In the terminology of E.V. Walter in the *Disguises of the Demonic* essay collection, Pynchon can be described as a ‘neo-heterodoxical’ writer.

The present mood might be named neo-heterodoxy, as the mood of the previous generation was named neo-orthodoxy [...] Neo-heterodoxy revives the ancient *victims* [emphasis my own] of historic Christianity, fetching from oblivion sorcery, magic, witchcraft, along with forgotten heresies and forbidden gods. Old pagan and heathen representations not only float out of the earth but threaten to bury their undertakers.⁶⁶

As you can see, Walter suggests a certain antagonistic property of these resurfacing religions against established Christianity. It is true indeed that Pynchon’s viewpoint is sympathising with the ‘outlawed’ religious knowledge systems. However, while Pynchon holds these ‘victims’ in high reverence, the editor Alan M. Olson does not. He refers to such heterodox standpoints as ‘the revival of interest in the Occult, witchcraft, astrology and other forms of religious diversion [...] which are all symptomatic of various kinds of contemporary religious faking.’⁶⁷ While this is the opinion of only one such theologian, it is an interesting contrast between Pynchon’s

⁶⁶ E. V. Walter, ‘Demons and Disenchantment’, *Disguises of the Demonic*, ed. Alan M. Olson (New York: Association Press, 1975), p. 18-19.

⁶⁷ Alan M. Olson, ‘Demons and Disenchantment’, *Disguises of the Demonic*, ed. Alan M. Olson (New York: Association Press, 1975), p. 21.

own theology and that of a traditional conservatism contemporary to *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the dichotomy between an orthodox and heterodox view of religion. This image of old beliefs floating out of the earth that Walter uses is eerily similar to Pynchon's own descriptions of the Counterforce, of old and dead concepts and ideologies emerging from the ground. As I have already shown, the depths of the earth represent enforced death, the 'banishment' of objects within the hidden folds of History, a Benjaminian notion I explored earlier. One such moment in *Gravity's Rainbow* occurs during the witch Geli Tripping's meditation on the raw, violent power of nature and the prehistory of the world bursting to the surface. Pynchon states man was put here to bring order to the chaos, to provide meaning and systems, something we achieved by the production and installation of Death.

Alive it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona around Earth's body that some spoiler had to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, we sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God's spoilers. Us. Counter-revolutionaries. *It is our mission to promote death.* (GR, p. 720)

It is this divine proclamation of the duty of the human race that Pynchon sees as the force behind the control systems in the world. But, as I have shown, there are always chinks of light in the text. The control systems are 'but only nearly as strong' (GR, p. 720), the counterforce burst through the dead earth and occupy spaces, gaps in the system, or as Pynchon calls them 'rests in the folksong Death' (GR, p. 720). The counterforce strives for the downfall of the Death Cults, the Death-based systems – systems built on narrative, singularity, Imperialism, order and the lie of resurrection. They seek to unravel the rational, for as Serres' claims, 'Rationalism is a vehicle of

death'⁶⁸. They welcome an ontological uncertainty, the upturning of order with chaos. To them, like Pynchon's own narrative style, there is perfection in multiplicity, in chaos without resolution.

It is the two images I have described that highlight the two poles of Pynchon's theological and philosophical world in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the parabola of the Rocket at one extreme representing the singular, deathly path of Calvinist control, and the diffuse chaos of the multiplicity at the heart of *The Zone* presenting an alternative. As Molly Hite claims in her book *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, 'The parabola is a metaphor *for* control and structure. It represents the kind of conceptual system that human beings use to circumscribe and rationalise their experiences in order to take charge of it.'⁶⁹ As Hite continues, she describes the obvious power of such a system, and how the lure of structure and the illusion of a totality of universal interconnectivity make us accept without question that the parabola is 'the shape of destiny.'⁷⁰ She writes that under the hypnotic comfort of the parabola, humanity will gladly follow its course, despite the knowledge that the course leads to destruction. The parabola's seduction works around the same set of variables as Calvinistic appeal; the denial of free will, replaced with faith in a destiny, a lit path of predetermined roads as opposed to darkened routes of complete self-determination. Calvinism, destiny, all become functions of the conspiracy to further death; like the parabola, they deny continuation and renewal, for they have origins and termini. They form just one half of the Ouroboros described in Kekule's dream, where in its original sense, it is a complete cycle of renewal.

⁶⁸ Michel Serres, *Genesis*, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁹ Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), p. 98.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 98.

So if the parabola is a destructive and singular symbol of order, then The Zone is an antithetical image of chaos. As stated before, this is the map of the Zone, an impossible map, something that Berressem describes as resistant to computation.

It is non-compressable, which means that it is un-categorizable. [...] as is the case with a series of numbers, which is defined as a random if the smallest algorithm capable of specifying its recreation by a computer needs about the same number of bits of information as the original series consisted of. This is why to compute a chaotic, complex and multiplex system, one would need a computer “as big as the system itself.” In a logic comparable to Borges’s famous map, one would need a map as big as the territory.⁷¹

The Zone is too complex to map, as it is the epitome of chaos and flux. To map it would be to attribute scales, lines, geometry to it, apparatus of order, and in terms of Pynchon, control. The Zone is in too much of a state of acceleration and change for this to happen. The zero point of the scale is lost under the myriad fractals of division and acceleration, much as Pynchon perceives the reality of universe itself. The totality of scale, speed and location of the universe is immeasurable, if *all* points are central. All we can do is measure from our location (which is subject to relativity), from our own individual zero point, so the universe/Zone can only be measured in the local, in the sea of the chaotic totality. Take one move in any dimension and the view changes. The Zone is anti-order, pro-possibility. Žižek writes in *The Neighbour* about the modernistic model of conceptual Europe (according to Jean-Claude Milner), something that mirrors nicely the nature of The Zone.

Modernity itself is propelled by a desire to move beyond laws to a self-regulated, transparent social body; the last instalment of this saga, today’s postmodern, neopagan Gnosticism, perceives reality as fully malleable,

⁷¹ Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon’s Poetics* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 1993), p. 9.

enabling humans to transform themselves into a migrating entity floating between a multitude of realities, sustained only by infinite love.⁷²

Of course, the point of The Zone is that a multitude of realities and systems cannot co-exist in such a state of gaseous, free-form chaos. The Enlightenment with its deification of rationale and singular truth simply does not allow such a thing to exist. While Milner's utopia represents the ideal European secular vision, Pynchon's Zone with its complete freedoms and complex pathways becomes something frightening, dangerous, and haunted by its own imminent destruction. As I mentioned, the constant shifting structure and infinite possibilities of the Zone is not redemptive. While it offers the polar opposite to the gravitational destruction offered by the parabola, it does not posit any structure of salvation, as it cannot cater to structure by the nature of its very being. All it can give is diffusion, and ultimately isolation. The irony of the Zone is that by being the opposite of parabolic predestination, it must also suffer gravity, in its own way. The parabola suffers from *brennschluss* because it is deemed *to be so*, and the chaotic worlds of the Zone collapse because their energy has been dispersed. The terrible fires beneath its feet have gone out.

All these systems coming to a head at the same point, Death, perhaps perpetuates the idea that Pynchon is a nihilistic writer, and perhaps I have theorised myself into a corner where I must admit this, but I remain in the belief that Pynchon is an optimistic writer. The beauty of Pynchon's work is that he does not make it easy for either the reader or even himself to plot a coherent path through all the detritus and dead ends to whatever utopian world can be salvaged from the text. Alternatives to Calvinism are not offered, but instead *possible routes* to an answer are implied. Unlike Berressem's 'line of rationale,' a concrete epistemological highway, these routes are dark, and navigate

⁷² Slavoj Zizek, *The Neighbour*, p. 151.

around the chaos of the universe instead of *cutting through* them. Pynchon's wartime setting of *Gravity's Rainbow* is a world filled with paths and roads that lead to death, routes that terminate, be that the path of the V-2 rockets, or the terminating train-tracks to work camps. The roads that do not lead to destruction are much more covert. In episode 16 of *Beyond the Zero*, Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake arrive at a carol service during a wintery storm, which Pynchon uses to pinpoint a moment of possibility, a moment of realisation for these potential pathways.

...no counterfeit baby, no announcement of the Kingdom, not even a try at warming or lighting this terrible night, only, damn us, our scruffy obligatory little cry, our maximum reach outward – *Praise be to God!* – for you to take back your war-address, your war-identity, across the snow's footprints and tire tracks finally to the path you must create by yourself, alone in the dark. Whether you want it or not, whatever seas you have crossed, the way home... (*GR*, p. 136)

Pynchon is positing here not only the fact that the road away from control, abandonment and death is difficult and dark, but also the terror involved in embarking upon it. The vocabulary of this passage invokes notions of striving and failure: 'scruffy', 'little' and 'maximum reach outward'. Pynchon never claims that utopian freedom is easy to achieve, but in this passage, he is opening up a new facet of his idea of resistance, by claiming that it 'must' be done. This chapter is littered with mentions of this path that must be pursued.

There must have been evensong here [literally the church on a local scale, but Pynchon means it in the more general, global sense] long before the news of Christ. Surely for as long as there have been nights bad as this one – something to raise the possibility of another night that could actually, with love and cockcrows, light the path home, banish the Adversary, destroy the boundaries between our lands, our bodies, our stories, all false, about who we are: for the one night, leaving only the clear way home... (*GR*, p. 135)

It is in passages like these that we see Pynchon tease us with glimpses of an utopian ideal. However, it is still nebulous, not quite realised. Add to this the playful and mischievous nature of Thomas Pynchon, and it is easy to question how serious he is. In this way, the text itself in its dubious and guileful manner highlights the exact point he is trying to make. The apparent inability of the reader to attribute a solid cosmological order to Pynchon's philosophy is in itself a statement claiming that in order to uncover the 'truth', one must strive and struggle. This concept of sacrifice to uncover the truth behind things is the backbone of all Pynchon's narratives, the nature of the acquisition of knowledge. This is a concept that is very present in Pynchon's theological analysis, and one I will be discussing in detail in future chapters.

Control

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this notion of Calvinism as the promoter of a singularity ties into how Pynchon begins to associate the doctrine with the concept of a 'master control system' working behind the entire historical context in the novel. Totalitarian endeavours, machinations of singularity and acts of imperialism are all directed through a prism that unites the malign elements of the text. The most explicit of this is the Franz Van Der Groov sequence, which depicts the puritan annihilation of the dodos of Mauritius.

The furious host were losers, impersonating a race chosen by God. The colony, the venture, was dying - like the ebony trees they were stripping from the island, like the poor species they were removing totally from the

earth, by 1681, *Didus ineptus* would be gone, by 1710 so would every last settler from Mauritius. The enterprise here would have lasted about a human lifetime.

To some it made sense. They saw the stumbling birds ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation. Was Mauritius some first poison trickle through the sheltering dikes of Earth? Christians must stem it here, or perish in a second Flood, loosed this time not by God but by the Enemy. The act of ramming home the charges into their musketry became for these men a devotional act, one whose symbolism they understood. (*GR*, p. 110)

The annihilation of the dodo birds becomes symbolic of a larger Calvinistic compulsion. That which does not align itself to a divine plan *must* be considered to be demonic in nature. There is also a suggestion of fear too, a sense of a poisoning and satanic 'otherness' that the ordered world must be barricaded against. The dodo, representational of all things that have no function or use to the control systems, comes to be a stand in for the multiplicity, and anathema for the sort of utilitarian Calvinist capitalist that Weber describes. Joseph Slade discusses the Van Der Groov passage and how it becomes microcosmic of this wider puritanical concern:

...[Tchitcherine] learns of the Russian extermination of the various ethnic nationalities, a barbarism Pynchon equates with the Calvinist annihilation of Indians in America and, more humorously, with the wiping out of the Dodo bird in seventeenth century Mauritius by Franz Van Der Groov, Katje Borgesius' ancestor. They crazy Dutch Puritan killed the flightless, stupid birds because he believed they did not fit in with God's scheme of things; the Russians killed Kirghiz (and others) because the communists believed they retarded the inevitability of historical development, and in that sense the Russians are Calvinists also, trying to impose an order on the windswept void of Asia.⁷³

Slade is correct that Van Der Groov is symbolic of the wider agenda of aggressive imperial homogenisation, and also that this passage ties in the violent imperialism of the world with Calvinist dogma. Calvinism itself has a particular duality to its properties; a

⁷³ Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Warner, 1974), p. 213.

reductive process that categorises all things into two distinct properties, functional with a divine plan, or dissonant to it. Thus, we could consider Calvinism, at least in Pynchonian terms, as the language of imperialism.

However, the Van Der Groov passage also explores the complexities of Calvinist ontologies in the novel. Franz's name can be translated from the Dutch to 'Franz from the groove', suggesting that Franz is a victim of a predetermined path, as if like a stylus following the grooves in a vinyl record. The election of these murderous Dutchmen is dubious; Pynchon calls them 'losers' perpetrating a fraudulent mimicry of the elect. The survival of their colony is failing, the land is being destroyed, blood soaked and soon becoming a wasteland in a perverted sense of the doctrine of man's dominance over the land expounded by Christianity. The Dutch colonists appear less as powerful agents of Calvinist intolerance and more akin to the preterite. They enact the familiar Calvinist ritual of 'acting elect' but appear equally to be the victims of it. A 'universal hysteria would take hold of them all,' (*GR*, p. 110) and they embark on the genocide not only of the dodo bird, but anything; 'treetops, clouds, leather demon bats screaming up beyond hearing.' The colonists become maddened and see enemies of the divine plan everywhere, gripped not by an imparted agency of their Calvinist god, but something more akin to our discussion of paranoia previously.

Franz and the Dutch colonists do not destroy the dodo to promote the controlling system of Calvinism, but act instead out of the terror of there not being an ordered centre. They suffer from anti-paranoia, and commit such bloody acts out of a desire for the existence of order. The dodos are dominant and *thus* occupy the same status as humans, and this alien ordering disturbs the colonist's world-view. Their only hope to continue their Calvinist beliefs is to consider such creatures as the *Enemy*, and to erase them from existence. They are defenceless and cannot talk, and thus they defend their

existence, or justify their place in a divine plan. 'No language meant no chance of co-opting them in to what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation.' (*GR*, p. 110) All this is narrated, however, Van Der Groov's own drives are a mystery to him; he embarks on his dodo genocide 'for reasons he could not explain.' (*GR*, p. 108) Calvinism as a master control system is inherent and deeply coded into the world. This notion goes some way to show the importance of Calvinism in the novel, how deeply embedded it is, and how all things are considered and transmitted through it.

So the claim could be made that Van der Groov and the colonists are preterite in nature, as opposed to Slade's image of them as representations of the violence inherent in the elect. However, the introduction of anti-paranoia into a discussion about the colonists speaks volumes about Pynchon's use of indeterminacy when considering Calvinistic status. As I mentioned earlier, Calvinist dogma demands the elect *act* elect, and that the truth as to one's election is hidden knowledge. The colonists do such a thing, but instead prove themselves to be passed over, trapped and maddened on a dying island, acting out a Calvinist doctrine of uniformity and death, as if pursuing some perverse Pascal's Wager. Election and preterition are consistently unknown, and the dualism here is muddled by a blurring of the two, each mirroring the other. Van Der Groov, terrified of being passed-over performs the murderous promotion of a singular ordered world-view, mirroring perhaps Slothrop's reverse situation: a man fleeing the oppressive election that may have been thrust upon him by escaping into the chaotic world of preterition. The elect and the preterite in *Gravity's Rainbow* seem to be subject to a form of quantum indeterminism, a cosmic case of Schrödinger's Cat, being both chosen and passed-over, waiting for the opening of the box that never comes.

Van Der Groov's maddened cleansing of the dodos of Mauritius is tempered by a guilt of sorts, a desire for the birds to gain the gift of speech, and thus be saved. He

witnesses 'a miracle: a Gift of Speech... a Conversion of the Dodoes,' (GR, p. 111) where, endowed with the ability to communicate with the colonists, the dodoes finally comprehend The Word, and becomes as 'brothers now, they and the humans who used to hunt them, brothers in Christ, the little baby they dream now of sitting near, roosting in his stable, feathers at peace, watching over him and his dear face all night long...' Here we see a fantastical (and farcical) dream of the missionary, the eradication of the alien and incomprehensible (evil, satanic, demonic) in exchange for the pliant and orderly supplicant of God, what Pynchon calls 'the purest form of European adventuring [...] the little converts flowing out of eye's field, so meek, so trusting...' (GR, p. 111)

Van Der Groov's vision of the 'enlightened' dodos arrayed on the shores of Mauritius is at least virtuous on his part. The vision suggests a unity under election, the dodo birds obtaining the same grace as him, becoming brothers in faith. However, there is an element of doubt towards the end of the passage that provides us some clear insight into Calvinism in *Gravity's Rainbow*. He muses on the nature of the salvation offered to those who suffer colonisation; a promise of 'everlasting life? An earthly paradise restored, their island as it used to be given back?' (GR, p. 111) It is a false promise, salvation is withheld in lieu of the Calvinist's 'blade, our necessary blade.' There is a clear critique on the missionary here which can be extrapolated to cover the entirety of the Calvinist master control system. What appears to be alien to the ordered, singular system must be either destroyed or analysed and ordered into a meek and pliable (and ultimately *useful*) object of the oppressor. The Calvinist is a duplicitous and self-serving thing, and Van Der Groov and the Dutch colonists are as much victims of its machinations as the dodos themselves.

The use of language as a tool of oppressive Calvinist control occurs across *Gravity's Rainbow*, and while this is a vast subject in itself, it is worth briefly touching

upon it in regards to how Calvinism acts in the novel as the definitive system of control. As we have explored in the analysis of the dodo passage, comprehension and understanding is essential for assimilation into any sense of a divine plan. Anything that cannot be analysed and categorised is considered demonic and cast out or even marked for death. Therefore language becomes another tool of control.

Specifically, Pynchon explores how language is subsumed, standardized and homogenized in order to oppress. The clearest example of this is the Weird Letter Assignments, the Russian office for the standardization of a plethora of languages into Cyrillic. This process is an insidious invasion of ideology, an appropriation of a multiplicity of disparate cultures by the seizure of their language.⁷⁴ The Koran is translated into Russian, an act considered to be a great blasphemy:

Using a non-Arabic alphabet is felt to be a sin against God - most of the Turkish people are after all, Islamic, and Arabic script is the script of Islam, it is the script in which the word of Allah came down on the Night of Power, the script of the Koran. (*GR*, p. 354)

Calvinism has no interest in the supposed divinity of the Koran, instead demanding its cooperation and supplication. The Muslim resistance to this 'invitation to holy war' (*GR*, p. 354) is farcical and shamelessly Orientalist; 'Blobadjian, accordingly, is pursued through the black end of Baku by a passel of screaming Arabists waving scimitars and grinning horribly.' (*GR*, p. 354) Resistance is figured through the prism of the controlling system, as the instigators are reduced to pastiche. However, there is once again some greater forms of resistance in the form of mischief (as we have seen, a deceptively powerful tool in Pynchon's armoury); '[Tchitcherine] and Radinchny sneak into Blobadjian's conference room next night with hacksaws, files and torches, and

⁷⁴ There is a deeper historical irony here. Cyrillic itself was a constructed alphabet designed to unify an empire. It was created by the first Bulgarian Empire in circa 890AD to create a standardized language and alphabet for the Empire to transcribe bibles into for the conversion to Christian orthodoxy.

reform the alphabet on his typewriter.' (GR, p. 353) Other 'childish' pranks ensue, such as the sabotage of office chairs. This simple prank is thus loaded with a strong sense of rebellion against the deadly serious and destruction act of the homogenization of language. Also, the act of transliteration itself is shown as a maddening task, as the bureau suffer crisis after crisis over individual translations of letters, and it is staffed by 'Ne'er do wells', 'nose fetishists', 'unstable practical jokers' (GR, pp. 352-3) and people with constantly strange plans for resistance, such as disguising oil derricks as phalluses and perpetuating the boycott of Latin alphabets in the Islamic world. The monumental task of subsuming all these cultural dialects, and the ridiculous scheming and subversion by the staff, could be conceived as an act of rebellion on behalf of the assailed multiplicity itself.

However, while there are pockets of rebellion and resistance in the text, Calvinism still reigns supreme as the overriding system that frames the novel. Its core tenant of the utter insistence of singularity reflects the works of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in particular their work on the enlightenment. Adorno and Horkheimer (referred to as A&H from here on) in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* suggest a violent mode to the Enlightenment's progression, associating it with a totalitarianism of rationale. Their critique at its core claims 'the enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty,'⁷⁵ a similar notion to Copinger's earlier claim that Calvinism posits the sovereign-ship of God. In fact, the Adornian notion that 'progress' moves to grant its proponents as the bearers of an absolute truth of things has much in common with the singular power and control of Calvinist doctrine in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Like the anathema that were the dodos of

⁷⁵ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. 3.

Mauritius, the enlightenment also abhors that which does not immediately adhere to its structure, as A&H state 'whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.'⁷⁶ Like Calvinism, A&H posit that the Enlightenment expounds a human desire for control over the totality of existence, one that comes from simple violence and force, but instead from a much more negating method of eroding the enemy's ontological status, transforming all that does not align with it into a 'mythic terror,'⁷⁷ a distant 'other' that *cannot possibly be understood*, so must be marginalised and removed from sovereign progress:

In the enlightened world, mythology has entered into the profane. In its blank purity, the reality which has been cleansed of demons and their conceptual descendants assumes the numinous character which the ancient world attributed to demons. Under the title of brute facts, the social injustice from which they proceed is now as assuredly sacred a preserve as the medicine man was sacrosanct by reason of the protection of his gods. It is not merely that domination is paid for by the alienation of men from the objects dominated. [...] The individual is reduced to the nodal point of the conventional responses and modes of operation expected of him. Animism spiritualized the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men.⁷⁸

A&H's depiction of control is almost parallel to how Pynchon frames Calvinism. Objects anathema to 'progress' (magic, spiritualism, the 'dissolution of myth'⁷⁹) are considered abhorrent and are negated, considered preterite. What replaces the older, animistic notion of a plethora of spirits inhabiting the world is reduced to a lack of spirit completely, a rational banishing of that particular metaphysical understanding. We see a mirroring where the objects supersede the soul, and humanity itself reduced to an aggregate of exploitable objects, in resistance to being 'reduced to animistic

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.6.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

superstition.⁸⁰ This is of course achieved through the industrialisation of Europe. Pynchon posits industry as a tool of the master control system as well, one that conspires to overthrow ideology, religion or ethics as a viable system for ordering the post-war world. We can see this in some provided background for Walter Rathenau:

His father Emil Rathenau had founded AEG, the German General Electric Company, but young Walter was more than another industrial heir—he was a philosopher with a vision of the postwar State. He saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither Red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational structure in which business would be the true, the rightful authority—a structure based, not surprisingly, on the one he'd engineered in Germany for fighting the World War. (*GR*, p. 164)

The focus on industry shares a similar purpose in both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Dialetics of Enlightenment*. The sterility of industry suggests that the control system is stricken with 'the fear of uncomprehended, threatening nature'. Business and industry become the sovereign power, and all discourses about value are reduced to be viewed through a capitalist lens. We are reminded of Max Weber, in particular his marriage of Calvinism with capital.

The notion of Calvinism as the core system of Western thought is expressed in detail by Weber in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber's study of the connection between Christianity and the advent of Capitalism adheres mostly to Protestant theology, but the majority of his work derives itself from an engagement with Calvinism. The most pertinent notion Weber posits in regards to my analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* above is the concept that Capitalism exists as an aggressive system, whose proliferation and downright survival relies on an *antagonistic* relationship with other systems, a required denial of the myriad of alternatives that

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

conflict with its core tenants, much like Van Der Groov and the dodos. Weber writes: 'the spirit of capitalism, in the sense in which we are using the term, had to fight its way to supremacy against a whole world of hostile forces.'⁸¹ This manifests in our analysis as the singular aggressively side-lining the multiple, a system that can only dominate (it can only dominate to exist, it cannot co-habit with conflicting systems according to Weber) that which conflicts with it. Whereas for Pynchon, the multiplicity reflects an innumerable melting pot of possible goals and interpretations of a utopian state, Weberian capitalism posits the only goal as the accruing of money and with it, its synonym *power*.

The acquisition of capital, according to Weber, is indelibly linked to the concept of Election. As Weber says, 'man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs.'⁸² With this the defining goal of all men under capitalism Weber links this notion to particular religious concepts, and *thus* the successful accruing of wealth reflects a 'proof' of the receiving of Calvinistic grace, of the accruer of wealth's Elect status.

Weber's analysis of Calvinism grants us a convincing enemy of the multiplicity, a workable paragon of the singular, oppressive powers of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Weber highlights the promotion of individualism in Calvinism, the notion that the fate of a man's soul is both of his own making, and paramount above all things;

No one could help him. No priest, for the chosen one can understand the word of God only in his own heart. No sacraments, for though the sacraments had been ordained by God for the increase of His glory, and

⁸¹ Weber, *Protestant Work Ethic*, p. 56.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 53.

hence must be scrupulously observed, they are not a means to the attainment of grace, but only the subjective *externa subsidia* of faith.⁸³

This form of religious asceticism promotes division and denies any sense of community or communal unity. The act of faith to a Calvinist is an utterly individual concern, 'carried out in deep spiritual isolation.'⁸⁴ The need for community – be it a church, a family or the assistance of a cleric – is utterly negated, and more so Weber claims that the Calvinist be against any sense of worldliness, citing the excommunication of Florence where the pope claimed they 'held' Love of their native city higher than the fear for the salvation of their souls.' The goal of Calvinism is individual spiritual well-being above all others; a value capitalism took on, the financial well-being of the individual above all others. It is this sense of abandonment and ascetic retreat that echoes in the cold, Calvinist powers in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Webers view of Calvinism focuses on two key points: the sole importance of the individual through an ascetic form of worship, and the acceptance of rationalism. Weber points out that Calvinism rejects the Catholic paradigm of mysticism, the magical properties of the church as institution, Calvinism promotes 'the rationalization of the world, the elimination of magic as a means to salvation.'⁸⁵ This of course is in opposition to Pynchon's own 'preterite religion', where magic and the mystical form (at least tentatively, more so in his later works) a salvific matrix. It is the preterite, the victims of the aggressive asceticism and cold rationalism of the Calvinist orthodoxy, who embrace the chaos that Calvin deemed to be anathema, a system utterly opposite and alien to the other. This is expressed by the exuberant counter-forcer Osbie Feel

⁸³ Ibid, p. 104.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 107.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 117.

(branded on his belly with the preterite mascot – the pig), as he explains the impossibility of the preterite resistance mimicking Calvinism in their resistance:

It's a little bewildering—if this is a “We-system,” why isn't it at least thoughtful enough to interlock in a reasonable way, like They-systems do?

“That's exactly it,” Osbie screams, belly-dancing Porky into a wide, alarming grin, “They're the rational ones. We piss on Their rational arrangements. Don't we . . . Mexico?”

“Hoorah!” cry the others. Well taken, Osbie. (*GR*, pp. 367-8)

It is the connection between a rejection of the rational in Pynchon's counter-religious vocabulary and Weber's marrying of Occidental rationalism with Calvinist dogma that leads us to discuss the position of the preterite within the rationalised and secular modern West.

The Calvinist master control system is complete in its totalitarian control of the world, due to its ability to deny and marginalise any sense of multiplicity in the novel. Pynchon's own dealings with the marginalised in *Gravity's Rainbow* is artfully tempered with the all-compassing doctrine of Calvinism, and the industrial capital complex it promotes. The exotic and esoteric nature of the preterite resistance is marred with problematic properties; Orientalism, colonialism and the general exotica of the multiplicity is a symptom of its transliteration from a thing in itself to a thing transmitted through a Calvinist model of understanding. By depicting such things in this fashion, Pynchon is expressing the inescapable dominance of a Calvinist way of examining the world. Osbie Feel resists the analytical rationale that the enlightenment demands we view the world through, but little can replace it. As Serres claims, the multiplicity cannot be categorised and explained and *thus* the counter to Calvinism is hamstrung by its own resistance to rational understanding. Hanjo Berressem in *Pynchon's Poetics* writes that 'the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of

calculating reason,⁸⁶ and thus without the familiar and firmly embedded Calvinist/capitalist/enlightenment demand for rational discourse, the alternative path remains in shadow. Resistance itself is rendered impotent by its own resistant power, the 'irrational' concepts of hope, faith and the admittance of the prospect of an alternative pathway. A&H in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* write about the limits put on faith by what they see as a tyrannical sense of the rational: 'Faith is a privative concept: it is destroyed as faith if it does not continually display its contradiction to, or conformity with, knowledge.'⁸⁷ Faith and hope become luxuries instead of essentials, due to their unquantifiable nature, and the systems of analysis are difficult to transcend. Resistance seems impossible when the ruling power structure has the monopoly on meaning.

Pynchon sees the irony of his own forms of resistance in *Gravity's Rainbow*, recognising their instability. Resistance must seem vague, incomprehensible and 'Othered' otherwise it will subsume *itself* into a system of analyse and control. The fact that an object can only exist at the behest of the master control system by either conforming, where it accepts and replicates the ideas of the controlling power, or resisting all reason, and becomes an outsider, a system fundamentally in conflict with the status quo, and therefore tenuous through this negative state it finds itself in. Calvinism holds control over everything chaotic and primal, colonising it with bastions of rationalism.

Control infiltrates everywhere, even the body. Slothrop's fear of election is partly from his rocket-induced erections, figured as an alien occupation of his body: 'His erection hums a certain distance, like an instrument installed, wired by Them into his

⁸⁶ Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics*, p. 126.

⁸⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialect of Enlightenment*, p. 19.

body as a colonial outpost here in our raw and clamorous world, another office representing Their white Metropolis far away...' (*GR*, p. 285) While Slothrop feels like an antenna for the master control system, Pynchon portrays even the Counterforce as (in some degree at least) thralls of the system:

They [the Counterforce] are as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us, and that's the hard fact. The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, his corporate emblem is a white albatross, each local rep has a cover known as Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit. (*GR*, p. 712)

The power of the master control system is derived from the same drive that is core to the function of both capitalism and Calvinism; the utter rejection of all other alternatives. Multiplicity is harmful for them, and as a result alternatives are quashed, both physically and ontologically. All men are reduced to labour, given to preterition, tormented by the promise of election, reduced to farcical versions of themselves. The characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* all becomes colonised in some fashion by Calvinism, either by being seduced into its dogma (Van Der Groov) or attempting to mirror it in opposition (the Counterforce). Transmission through the master control system is impossible to escape.

The Zone - the post-war chaotic wasteland where the counterforce amass - offers a resistant space against the master control systems. However, the nature of this resistance is complex and riddled with contradiction. The nature of the Zone is dangerously temporary, opened up only by the chaos of the War but constantly on the brink of collapse and submission to control. Despite its openness and acceptance of a chaotic pluralist world view, it still lies under the oppressive shadow of Calvinism. In one of the

first encounters with the Zone, Squalidozzi the Argentinian exile expresses to Slothrop the theory behind it:

Squalidozzi, taking it for mild insanity instead of rudeness, only blinks once or twice. "In ordinary times," he wants to explain, "the center always wins. Its power grows with time, and that can't be reversed, not by ordinary means. Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times . . . this War—this incredible War—just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years. Wiped it clean. Opened it."

"Sure. For how long?"

"It won't last. Of course not. But for a few months . . . perhaps there'll be peace by the autumn—discúlpeme, the spring, I still haven't got used to your hemisphere—for a moment of spring, perhaps. . . ."

"Yeah but—what're you gonna do, take over land and try to hold it? They'll run you right off, podner."

"No. Taking land is building more fences. We want to leave it open. We want it to grow, to change. In the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless." (GR, pp. 265-6)

Squalidozzi is keenly aware of the Zone's transitory nature. At the end of the passage he says '...our hope is limitless.' Then, as if struck on the forehead, a sudden fast glance, not at the door, but *up at the ceiling* - 'So is our danger.' (GR, p. 266) The hope granted by the possibility of the Zone is immediately countered by the inevitable closing in of the control systems upon it, suggested here by the phantom of the Rocket, the 'terrible mass above' that represents the omnipresent dangerous intervention of the hand of God. The claim that the 'incredible War' allowed for the creation of the Zone is contradictory to the paranoid claim that the War is the conspiracy of the industrial cartels to promote wider levels of control over the world. The Zone is reliant on such contradictions for - like everything in the novel - it is subject to the Calvinist world which it has sprung from. The hope it embodies is drawn from its opposite, the negation of hope brought about by control. The Zone is like a mirror to it, a phantom image of what has been oppressed that only is visible for a moment. As Serres states, 'noises

loom up, figures, shapes against the background. They appear and withdraw, take form and dissolve, grow and disappear by melting into the background.⁸⁸

But yet there is some power in this mirroring of the master control system. The Zone functions to highlight points where the 'mask slips' off the face of Calvinism. While Calvinism seeks to unite everything under one rational way of thinking (all that adheres to God's plan), the Zone seeks a similar homogeneity in its desire to bring together the disparate multiplicity under one banner of resistance. Ironically, the Zone posits a singularity of its own, one that contains the preterite as an aggregate. This singularity is a subversion of its sterile, oppressor alternative, and allows for a fleeting moment a hint of hope for the preterite, an alternative which the master control system attempts to extinguish. In the bombed out 'Rocket Towns', Pynchon alludes to vague dreams of alternative paths:

The Zone is in full summer: souls are found quiescent behind the pieces of wall, fast asleep down curled in shell-craters, out screwing under the culverts with gray shirttails hoisted, adrift dreaming in the middles of fields. Dreaming of food, oblivion, alternate histories. . . .

The silences here are retreats of sound, like the retreat of the surf before a tidal wave: sound draining away, down slopes of acoustic passage, to gather, someplace else, to a great surge of noise. (*GR*, p. 337)

The language employed here has Pynchon turn a bombed out wasteland into something positively pastoral, with sanguine lovers supine on the ground, musing on alternatives which, outside the Zone, control won't even allow them to consider. The second paragraph also alludes to something primeval beneath the Zone, a 'surge of noise' that both serves as a nostalgic cry for some primal anger, and also explicitly brings us back to the background noise material from Serres. On occasions such as this,

⁸⁸ Serres, *Genesis*, p. 62.

Pynchon chooses not to frame resistance through Calvinism, but present it in its raw, original form; an incomprehensible but imminent irruption of rebellious chaos. This primal power is something that will be taken into deeper consideration later in this thesis.

The Zone in itself may not be a salvific space, but it allows Pynchon to veer himself away from a nihilistic acceptance of the invulnerability of Calvinism as a master control system, and show transitory but vital moments of resistance. Calvinism, enlightenment philosophy and capitalism invest heavily in the divorce of man from his spirituality, positing the metaphysical entities of love, faith and hope (a theological triumvirate in themselves, being the virtues professed in Corinthians 13:13) as irrational luxuries. *Gravity's Rainbow* tells us that 'the real and only fucking is done on paper' (*GR*, p. 615), but previously Pynchon depicts fondly homosexual love affairs in the trenches: 'while men died meanly in its own wastes, men loved.' (*GR*, p. 614) The Zone is a representation of this idea, the valuable formed out of the oppressive and evil, the love blossomed in the war, the freedom briefly opened up in bombed out Germany. While these salvific potentials are eradicated or outmoded, to 'idle and bitchy faggotry', (*GR*, p. 614) their existence alone suggests Pynchon is beginning to undermine the nihilism of his acceptance of the totality of a Calvinist world. As Roger and Jessica are depicted in one of the simplest but most powerful points of resistance against the master control system, 'They are in love. Fuck the war.' (*GR*, p. 41)

CHAPTER TWO

Oppression and Control through Gnosticism

A Gnostic/Orphic dichotomy

Currently, the most comprehensive study of the Gnostic in Pynchon's work is Dwight Eddins' *The Gnostic Pynchon*. Eddins expresses that Gnosticism constitutes a significant part of Pynchon's theological output, from its mystical origins through to its modern, secular incarnation as a method of expressing an elitist 'gate keeping' of information (via the philosopher Eric Voeglin). Eddins opens his thesis with a link between the concept of gnosis as protected, elite knowledge and the already established concept of Control, suggesting that gnosis in the text acts as 'an elaborate conspiracy so potent and pervasive that it acquires a quasi-transcendental status.'⁸⁹ In his introduction, Eddins is quick to make the link between mathematics and science and Gnosticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, claiming that the partial differential equation seen in the first third of the novel can be perceived as a magical 'sigil', a secret language, a move that turns the scientific into a set of esoteric signifiers - completely incomprehensible to the unscientific masses who will become their victims, but easily glossed by the scientific elite who have achieved some degree of gnosis - in this case, the secret knowledge of Control.' Eddins makes the connection between the scientific content of the novel - mainly the death-dealing technologies at play in the work - with a religious framework of guarded, perhaps divinely imparted knowledge ('a secular goal pursued religiously'⁹⁰).

⁸⁹ Dwight Eddins. *The Gnostic Pynchon*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

Science becomes a secret language much like the mystic language and practises of the Gnostics, and *thus* Gnosticism becomes a shorthand for the aggressive scientism at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This notion he calls 'the basic apparatus of Pynchon's paranoid vision.'⁹¹

An elegant link can be made between my prior work in chapter one on Calvinism as a dominant system of ideological control and Eddins' own stitching together of science and Gnosticism. Science is reduced in *The Gnostic Pynchon* to a religious framework, with technological as its modus operandi: 'the worship of scientific method and its attendant axia of control through technology.'⁹² While Calvinism posits control as a necessary jettison of everything at odds with the perceived 'Divine Plan' (the multiplicity) in order to maintain a singular ordered world, science through Gnosticism is a revealed lexicon that allows such control to manifest. Already Gnosticism and Calvinism have their ascetic demands in common, and their notion of information (for one it is grace, the other gnosis) being transmitted only to an elite few. Eddins explicitly makes the connection himself, pointing out that 'Pynchon makes it clear that scientism is descended from Puritanism, which postulated a divine mandate for the exploitation of earth...'

So we can claim, via Eddins, that Calvinism and Gnosticism make up a 'theology of control', expressing dominant secular power as theological concepts. The Elect desire the ordering of the world by their terms, and the tools they use are the Gnostic implements of science. Eddins considers the entire world of *Gravity's Rainbow* to be a Gnostic text, with the mathematics of the Rocket representing 'only the 'bourgeois' reduction of an even more arcane 'Text' that outlines a plan of absolute domination.' The

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 1.

⁹² Ibid, p. 5.

world as a Gnostic text in itself leads Eddins to suggest there are various dialectics of order and chaos at work. Gnosticism provides both the apparatus for the controlling systems, a hidden set of revelation that provide the demiurgic control of all things, and the 'dramatically subversive possibility that the vision is *mere* paranoia.'⁹³ The instability of Pynchon's postmodern sensibilities allows for a strong interplay between connectedness and non-connectedness, questioning the viability of a singular, secret Text of the World and the existence of a Gnostic elite. From this dichotomy between the existence and non-existence of a singular controlling authority, Eddins sets up a counter theology to the Gnostic, calling it Orphic Naturalism, a concept we will return to later in this chapter.

Firstly, Eddins' work on the Gnostic in Pynchon's texts (namely for our purposes, in *Gravity's Rainbow*) must be analysed and considered from the viewpoint established in chapter one; where can we place Gnosticism if we are to construct a 'religion of the Preterite' in Pynchon's corpus? Eddins' reading of the Gnostic in Pynchon is characteristically devoid of any liberation, bar that from the instability of its power within the text - as we have covered during the discussion of Pynchon's subversion of Calvinism in chapter one, that which negates or subverts holds no use for us when constructing a liberation theology. However, the previous chapter throws up some disagreements with Eddins, in regards to certain assumptions he makes. In his introduction he states that the younger Pynchon (the Pynchon of the *Slow Learner* short stories) accepted 'the neutrality of an existentialist cosmos',⁹⁴ but hinted at the prospect of demiurgic conspiracies at work there as well. *Thus*, this leads to Pynchon having to

⁹³ Ibid, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 24.

take on a Gnostic viewpoint, consciously skewing his perceptions. Eddins states this leads us towards:

Explaining the difficulties in separating Pynchon's implicit norms and hopes from what often seems a prevailing (and corrosive) skepticism, a negating of all onto-epistemological foundations; and thus towards explaining the equally puzzling deformation of apparently serious questers and quests into cartoon characters and farces.⁹⁵

What Eddins is trying to put forth here is an inherent flaw in Pynchon's writing - a *Gnostic* viewpoint that colours his fiction and negates any potential liberation of salvific material, reducing it to pantomime. Pynchon's preoccupation with control and the ever-present 'They' reflect a hierarchy inherent in *Gnostic* thought, and the opposing chaos and ontological instability of his postmodern tendencies reflect, according to Eddins, create alienation and paranoia, which he claims to be more tropes of Gnosticism. It is this consistent nihilistic viewpoint that Eddins claims is the element that removes any potential power from the satirical myths that Pynchon sets up.

This dehumanising of the satirical hero in Pynchon's work is where my work on Gnosticism may differ from Eddins. Eddins claims that the predetermined path of the satirical hero is governed by 'vectors of force specifically designed by some mechanism of Gnostic Control to automate a particular character, or at least emanating from that mechanism with a general dehumanizing intent.' It is pointed out that only the preterite are dehumanized in this way, turned into caricatures, and those who hold gnosis (like Blicero) are treated with 'deadly seriousness'⁹⁶. These reductions of the preterite mythologies are 'exposed as a bitter, life-negating perversion, not a humanizing corrective.' While Eddins appears to making the case for the underlying chaos in

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 25.

Pynchon's work to be little more than Gnostic nihilism, this appears to not entirely be the case. The irreverence, pastiche and madcap esoteric allusions that accompany the preterite communities could equally have liberating possibilities above an overall sense of *Gnostic* devaluing.

The 'seriousness' of Blicero does not immediately place him in a particular position of control over the farce and silliness that often personify the preterite. The lowly preterite embarking on their mad quests could just as easily represent Osbie Feel pissing 'on their rational arrangements.' (*GR*, p. 368) Eddins claims that the 'self-conscious irony that constantly subverts its own deformations' that accompanies the Preterite creates 'a nihilistic miasma in which no norm beyond a generalized iconoclasm is discernible.'⁹⁷ However, Pynchon firmly considers the notion of discernible things to tools of Control, similar to the controlling (and particularly Calvinist) obsession with analysis, sub-division and categorisation. The constantly deforming and re-considered state of the preterite is deliberately incalculable, not so to be a homogeneous, inhuman void as Eddins suggests, but to wilfully resist Control but having no ontological certainly to hold on to. As Kathryn Hume writes in *Pynchon's Mythography*, the postmodern and the mythological can be integrated, not the case of one negating the other, as Eddins suggests. Identity in flux does not cause the satirical hero to lose meaning, but to take on a vital new identity, that of flexible hero of the 'new hero-myth.'⁹⁸ Hume writes:

In building a new hero pattern as he does, Pynchon gives us not only a model for the individual in a fragmented reality, but also a model for the individual as a reader of this text. One obvious quality demanded of both reader and Pynchonesque hero is flexibility. The rules of the game change frequently for Slothrop, and his survival depends on his ability to change as

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 25.

⁹⁸ Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to Gravity's Rainbow* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 206.

rapidly. So too for readers; flexibility is required if they are to survive the rather brutal battering given the traditional rules of fiction.⁹⁹

The preterite hero is not a victim of Gnostic alienation as Eddins speaks of, but resistant to it. The Gnostic demiurges that Eddins writes about are static, proponents of entropy. The ominous seriousness of the demiurge is not supported by the constant deformations of their preterite puppets but instead undermined by their shifting sense of identity, a 'mischief' as it were. Mischief is considered a counter to the austere and intransigent seriousness of the Cartel, not a submission. As Samuel Thomas writes in *Pynchon and the Political*, 'mischief is serious business.'¹⁰⁰ Is it this notion of the radically resistant importance of mischief that forms the overtone of an emergent Preterite religion, and a concept that begins to crystallise in Pynchon's later novels, and a vital concept that I will tackle later in this thesis.

This 'gnosis of Control' put forth by Eddins represents a theological perversion of Molly Hite's idea of how gnosis functions in Pynchon's work. To Hite, revelation exists as a singularity that the varied quests for knowledge orbit around. Hite states that 'the Holy Centre is the terminus of the quest, the epiphany point in both time and space where the questing hero realizes the full meaning of his life, his search, and his world. It is thus the conclusion towards which the narrative tends.'¹⁰¹ According to Eddins, Gnosticism in the texts removes any salvific content from this Holy-Centre, positing it as an alienating force that acts as a purveyor of spiritual non-presence. To Eddins, the concept of a single point of divine revelation is a flawed concept, as the Holy-Centre represents the manipulative centre of control of the Gnostic elite. The centre is the 'planetary mission' (*GR*, p. 521) of the Calvinists to rule, divine and destroy. Any quest

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 182.

¹⁰¹ Molly Hite, "Holy-Center-Approaching" in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 12/2 (1982), 121-129, p. 121.

undertaken towards such a thing is a paranoid spiralling towards the destructive core of the demiurgic powers, a *Gnostic* cabal that are unreachable; 'you may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures.' (*GR*, p. 238)

So we can easily connect Eddins' Demiurgic/Gnostic elite with the Calvinist elite from the previous chapter. Both Gnosticism and Calvinism promote a form of asceticism that seeks to impose a specific structure upon the world, partly derived from an abhorrence of the multiplicity and chaos that is represented in immediate nature (and by extension, the preterite). The Holy-Centre is thus figured *in these terms*, and revelation is thus framed 'with a stasis and perfection beyond nature.'¹⁰² So if we consider the Holy Centre to be a zone beyond the physical world, we may fall into an ascetic trap.

Eddins solves this problem with the introduction of Orphic naturalism, his counter to Pynchon's diabolical Gnostic plots. In simple terms, the concept embraces everything rejected by the Gnostic and Calvinist philosophies, resulting in an almost animistic viewpoint, positing the earth not as an exploitable resource but as a living haven of life resisting the cosmic hostility of demiurgic forces. Eddins suggests the irony of having a resistant theology mirror its oppressor (a quest narrative is still in place, the understanding of the multiplicity of nature apes the decoding usually inherent in Gnosticism) is resolved in...

...a *coup de grace* of reflexivity by which *Gravity's Rainbow* itself becomes the Real Text. Encyclopaedic, religious, focus on the ultimate issues of ethics and metaphysics, the novel functions as a Torah of Orphic naturalism, revealing the nature of Gnostic evil at the same time it reveal the Way Back to communion with Earth.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, p. 150.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 150.

As Eddins claims, Orphic naturalism solves Pynchon's problem with Gnosticism, allowing him to traverse what has become for him a limiting and nihilistic doctrine. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus becomes the text for this resistant theological stance, in the same fashion that David Marriot suggests that 'Some parts of *Gravity's Rainbow*, I think, might best be described as an attempt at writing a twentieth century "gospel."¹⁰⁴ What is radical in Eddins' claim, is its reassessment of the traditional critical viewpoint of the 'Holy-Centre', and the first attempt to explore a resistant theological possibility that escapes any sense of scepticism or nihilism. On the notion of the novel being an Orphic text, Eddins writes:

The principle exponent of this religion in *Gravity's Rainbow* [Orphic Naturalism] is the author-persona himself, but he allows several characters experiences of transport in which they are entirely affected by the perception of a sentient Earth and of ultimate union with it. The ultimate triumph of this persona is a document – *Gravity's Rainbow* – that becomes the "Sacred Text" to which it so frequently alludes. In this capacity – a sort of scriptural metastructure – the book indeed exposes the inadequate and contradictory "Holy Centres" as so incisively explored by Molly Hite; but in the very process it functions itself as the image of a more comprehensive and reconciling Centre. The book is, in the last analysis, the Orphic Word that preserves, valorises, and ultimately redeems the chaotic, transient reality it enshrines.¹⁰⁵

If Orphic naturalism *is* the first example of a concrete salvific religious construct in Pynchon, free of the contradictory nihilism that (according to Eddins, at least) haunts his previous work, then it is worth discussing how Eddins frames it.

Orphic naturalism, as Eddins writes it, is the projection of 'the mirror reversal of the Gnostic trap.'¹⁰⁶ By doubling the complex *knotting into* that Gnosticism makes people endure and having it 'emerge as a *de facto* disentanglement.' Eddins states that

¹⁰⁴ David Marriot. "'Gravity's Rainbow': Apocryphal History or Historical Apocrypha?", *Journal of America Studies*, 19/1 (1985), 69-80, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 110.

by granting the novel the status of a 'holy text', a satire is being performed on the notion of the world functioning as an oppressive, demiurgic text. 'It is by a parody of a parody that Pynchon eventually locates the normative point of origin.' The layers of parody themselves act as a critique on the paranoid sifting through of the regressive layers created by the Gnostic manipulators. The damage done by Gnosticism in Pynchon is mischievously mocked by this satirical mirroring, in what Eddins calls Pynchon's 'funhouse-mirror modality.'

Through the now familiar Pynchonian method of doubling, Eddins depicts the radical resistance of Orphic naturalism to be in utter opposition to Gnosticism. At its core, the concept is a 'religious revalorizing of primordial Earth and natural process [that] is anathema to the Gnostic technicians who make up the Cartel.'¹⁰⁷ It embodies the chaos of nature in imposition to the singular ordering system of the Gnostic, and resists the 'unnatural permanence of death' with closed systems of self-sufficiency and rejuvenation, and ultimately resurrection.¹⁰⁸ As Eddins describes it, Orphic naturalism as a working religion in resistance to Gnosticism is carefully utterly antithetical to it, so much so that the conflict between chaotic nature and a pluralistic freedom and synthesis and death parodies 'each other with an eerily perverse precision at almost every point.'¹⁰⁹ Pynchon's escape from the Gnostic sensibilities of his earlier works *thus* relies on the duality between not just the specific doctrines of Eddins' Orphic naturalism and Gnosticism, but also on a thematically wider scale. Death is replaced with life, order replaced with chaos, entropy replaced with eternal rejuvenation. Blicero's *death-kingdoms* are countered with an animistic concept of the Earth having a consciousness

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 111.

¹⁰⁸ See the material on the Ouroboros in Chapter One, e.g. Kekule's serpent.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 111.

in itself. I will quote here a general quote depicting the modes of Eddins' mind-body idea:

The sentient Earth for Pynchon is that which alone continues, that which contains the unfathomable mysteries of life processes. It is also that which transcends the individual, whose reverence for this matrix and awareness of its long-term beneficence (despite his short term fate) constitute the differentiating revelation that pulls him away from blind animality and towards conscious identification with the primal animating powers of procreation and regeneration. It is the most primitive and basic of religious impulses, but in Pynchon as narrator it receives the most subtle differentiation. Having viewed the Earth through scientific lenses, Pynchon is able to return to the contemplation of the 'mindbody' with a sophisticated sense of the mysteries and morality involved.

As the transcendental pole of Pynchon's *metaxy*, animate Earth reflects certain imperatives upon humanity. One is reverence for the organic mysteries involved in the subtlety and continuity of life. Another is a deep respect for the community of existence, both organic and inorganic, a respect that recognizes the integrity of the various members of that community even as it recognizes the vital kinships between them.¹¹⁰

This reverence for the mysterious and transcendent power of the natural world is expressed early in *Gravity's Rainbow*, with Pirate's banana breakfast where 'it is not often Death is told so clearly to fuck off.' (*GR*, p. 10) Just Death is jettisoned in this passage, but the whole Gnostic/Calvinist system of order and analysis. Eddins claims Pynchon uses nostalgia for a lost sense of primordial unity as the nominative drive of Orphic naturalism, setting up a theology of the Earth as a unified mind-body as the original 'truth' that Gnosticism has sought to usurp. Like the preterite rising from the strata of coal tars that we encountered in chapter one, this antithetical religious system represents an irruption of something older.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 113.

What Orphic naturalism allows is not the negation of a particular Gnostic brand of transcendence (complete with its ascetic hatred of the 'base', natural world) but instead opens up a dialogue with *alternative* methods of transcendence. As Eddins writes, it posits 'the mere possibility of a life-affirming and non-totalizing transcendence [...] a locus of redeeming values to be found in the natural order.'¹¹¹ It allows for a contradictory route that 'survives in stubborn contra-distinction to the destructive Gnostic pressures permeating the world,' one that transcends the Gnostic 'prison', finding itself in a discourse with through the resistant effect of it mirroring and upending that cosmology. Orphic naturalism acts to reignite the spiritual aspect of transcendence in the face of a secular Gnostic system. Pynchon's assessment of nature as a redemptive zone against the destructive forces of control is (as expected) a complex interaction with animistic ideas, and a fundamental engagement with the power of nostalgia in general. The complexities of such an approach are explored further later in this thesis.

For now, there are some points regarding Eddins' reading of Gnosticism in Pynchon that would benefit from a fresh look. *The Gnostic Pynchon*'s thesis relies on a reductive duality, where the Gnostic is representative of control and its satirical opposite is the avenue to a true spiritual liberation. There is constant war between two spiritual camps, one positing control and stasis, the other liberation from these elements. The battle is fought over which system reflects the truer image of 'The Word', 'Orphic song as Word and Gnostic Rocket as Word.'¹¹² Eddins is suggesting that *Gravity's Rainbow* can be reduced to a novel that frames the conflict between order and chaos, between control and freedom. I am in no way disagreeing with this concept (Eddins has provided

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 108.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 152.

us with the most complete analysis of spiritual conflict in Pynchon's work to date) but there are moments in the text that throw up questions about the absolute nature of such a duality.

Eddins' work links the Gnostic with emergent modernist notions of secularism and scientism. The industrialisation of the world, colonialism and an utterly modern sense of control and surveillance are figured in his analysis through a Gnostic lens. Resistance is thus figured as a nostalgic reigniting of primordialism; a return to a starting point where communion with the earth itself is paramount, something that works in complete antithesis to Eddins' reading of Gnosticism. Here we see a conflict that I discussed in chapter one, a friction between a pre-modern sensibility and a post-war sense of aggressive progress 'at all costs' (as explored by Adorno and Horkheimer). What Eddins is missing in this framework is an acknowledgement of the importance of nostalgic thought in Gnosticism.

A key part of Gnostic thought is its eschatology. While Eddins claims it functions in Pynchon to control, analyse and divide much like the secular control systems of the twentieth century themselves, Gnosticism promotes an eventual, holistic state of unity. The 'breaking of the vessels', described Rabbi Isaac Luria as *The Shevirah*, states that the divine sparks of god were distributed across the physical earth, and placed into all men. The *Tikkun* is the apocalyptic event where the sparks are united by the gift of gnosis to all men, and the divine unity of the universe is restored. The *Shevirah* is explicitly referred to in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Rollo Groust's work in the White Visitation provides us with both Gnostic and nostalgic material. A discussion between Groust and an older operative provides cryptic references to an 'Outer Level', a place that is heard of only in generationally transmitted

gnosis. The young Groust asks the older operative about visiting the 'Outer Level', but has any sense of it reduced to a nihilistic silence:

-Outlandish scenery, oh yes so did I – unusual formations, a peep into the Outer Radiance. But it's all of *us*, you see. Millions of *us*, changed to interface, to horn, and no feeling, and silence.

-Oh God. (A pause in which he tries to take it in – then, in panic, pushes it back;) No – how can you say that – you can't feel the *memory*? The tug... we're in exile, we do have a home! (Silence from the other.) Back there! Not up at the interface. Back in the CNS!

-(Quietly) It's been a prevalent notion. Fallen sparks. Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back to home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home – only the millions of last moments... no more. Our history is an aggregate of last moments. (*GR*, p. 148)

On face value, this passage could be interpreted as a now familiar negation of the Gnostic; a denial of the salvific potential of *Tikkun*. Groust's youthful naïveté at the existence of the Gnostic promise of a nostalgic unity is tempered by the truths posited by the operative. However, upon closer analysis, it becomes apparent that the *Tikkun* itself is not in question here (for the outright denial of such a salvific restoration has a negative impact on the nostalgic qualities of Eddins' Orphic naturalism), but instead Pynchon is suggesting a malaise, a spiritual 'numbness' to the reception of such a possibility. The Gnostic control system and the eschatological possibilities of Gnosticism separate, as the controlling Gnostic powers that Eddins posits becomes divorced from any spiritual quality that Gnosticism can provide. Groust's desire for a collective memory of unity is not discarded as folly, but suppressed. This brief acknowledgement of a nostalgic salvation *within* Gnosticism goes some way to create problems for Eddin's dualist reading. Nostalgia to Eddins is one of the cornerstones of salvation in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

Nostalgia is one of the dominant emotions of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and it is obviously connected with the impulse of Return. It is a blessed inertia, a drag against the one-way time of the Gnostics. The conscious cultivation of nostalgia and of the deeply human values enshrined in its transcendent moments is a variety of the renewal-within-preterition at the Pynchon's norm. These rescued moments, which resemble Wordsworth's "spots of time" in their redemptive powers, are themselves a part of the Real Text, enshrined in the novel as normative affirmations that counterbalance and heighten the exposure of *Gnostic* designs.¹¹³

If nostalgia is such a crucial part of the *resistance* to Gnosticism in the text as Eddins posits, then it becomes compromised. Despite Eddins' absolute division between the Gnostic and natural, we can see a blurring of the two that adds a new complexity to Pynchon's negotiation with the theology here.

Groust's belief in a salvific Gnosticism is suffused in the passage with suggestions of primordialism and unity. He muses on Gavin Trefoil, a teenager in the White Visitation who has the preternatural ability to adjust his skin tone, something which Groust interprets as a link back to a human primordial state, a mythologised time of racial unity that Trefoil has found a link back to, 'retrocolonial[ly]'. (*GR*, p. 147) His exclamation that this unified memory is located in the central nervous system (CNS) again suggests a primordial state, a salvific possibility not derived from exterior systems of control but buried deep within the Id. To Groust, the primordial past *is* Gnostic salvation. Orphic naturalism, Eddins' opposing force to Gnosticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is also deeply embedded with primordial unity. Eddins does indeed broach this point, claiming that there is a contradiction between Orphic nostalgia and Gnosticism, stating 'the Way Back to an idyllic state is itself a version of the Lurianic

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 151.

return to the Gnostic Center.’¹¹⁴ But as we have seen, Pynchon takes contradiction seriously, contradiction to him is form of rebellion, and it is in these paradoxes we often find certain spiritual truths.

If there are glimpses in the text that suggest something akin to salvation *within* Gnosticism, then we must be willing to separate the Gnostic into a spiritual type, and a control type. The control type of Gnosticism we have discussed now at length, it is the secular control systems that Pynchon figures through Gnostic thought. The spiritual type is a much sparser entity within the text, but it can be seen reflecting Pynchon’s own values of change, resistance and possibility that previously Eddins links solely to Orphic naturalism. This split is shown in the plethora of attitudes towards the symbolism of the Rocket, of which I have previously only figured as the key symbol of control in the novel. However, it also becomes at times a rallying point for resistant figures:

But the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it – in combat, in runnel, on paper – it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable... and heretics there will be: Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wind and fire to chambers of the Rocket-throne... Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter – rivets, burner cup and brass rose, its text is theirs to permute and combine into new revelations, always unfolding... (*GR*, p. 726)

The context of this passage has the Rocket – as the absolute symbol of the omnipotence of the master control system – attempting to ‘survive’ such an indeterminate status being imposed on it by the multiplicity. The rebellious incursions of the heretics on the mono-symbol of control are treated with aggression, and ‘the dominion of silence will enlarge as each one goes down.’ (*GR*, p. 726) Such alternative

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 150.

definitions of the Rocket are abhorrent to the master control system, whose power is reliant on the singular definition of their weapon. While Pynchon is clear that the multiplicity will be annihilated by the all-powerful control system, such resistance and alternative possibilities are still present - and more importantly when regarding Eddins' analysis – in Gnostic forms. Amidst the aggressive, oppressive secularism that takes on a Gnostic form we can find a more reverent, salvific and mystical form of Gnosticism.

One of the chief forms of Gnosticism in *Gravity's Rainbow* as identified by Eddins is Merkabah mysticism: 'One particular sect within the Kabbalistic tradition centred upon a phenomenon known as Merkabah mysticism, which concerned itself with the Chariot (*Merkabah*) of God and the possibility of mystical ascent therein.'¹¹⁵ Eddins makes it clear that the Rocket supplants the chariot as vessel of transcendence, and thus Blicero's Gnostic transformation is figured directly through this image, in particular the 00000, in which his lover Gottfried is entombed and launched, in a parody of mystic transcendence. Eddins states that Blicero's 'descent into a phantasmal netherworld parallels his projected ascent [...] to the 'Deathkingdom' of the 'Moon',¹¹⁶ in his own fuel-injected Merkabah chariot. The proposed destination of the Moon as the perverse destination of Gnostic ascent is loaded with meaning. Firstly, it is tied to the real world Apollo Moon landings, made possible by Werner Von Braun's (Blicero of course functions as his avatar in *Gravity's Rainbow*) Nazi research. Von Braun's career could be framed as Gnostic ascent, as he was plucked from his position as a Nazi war criminal by project Paper-clip to a position of power, fame and fortune within NASA. Von Braun becomes the symbol of the scientism that the Gnostics of the novel ruthlessly represent, a sense of progress at all costs (to quote American satirical

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 147.

songwriter Tom Lehrer's *The Ballad of Werner Von Braun*, 'the widows and cripples of old London town, owe their large pensions to Werner Von Braun.')

The Manichaeistic dream of 'a good Rocket to take us to the stars' (*GR*, p. 726) is subverted by both the appropriation of the Moon as the cold end-game of Gnostic entropic collapse, and the real Moon-landing that occurred four years prior to the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow*, an event that had its origin in a Nazi weapon that caused the deaths of thousands. The Moon itself appears throughout the novel, both as a symbol of sterile futuristic colony ('We can fly to the moon, we'll be higher than noon/ In our polythene home in the sky...' (*GR*, p. 175)) and as a part of animistic myth. In fact, a Herero myth which Pynchon includes posits the idea of the Moon as 'Deathkingdom' as a fallacy:

It began in mythical times, when the sly hare who nests in the Moon brought death among men, instead of the moon's true message. The true message has never come. Perhaps the Rocket is meant to take us there someday, and the Moon will tell us its truth at last. There are those down in the Erdschwein-hohle, younger ones who've only known white autumn-prone Europe, who believe the Moon is their destiny. But older ones can remember that Moon, like Ndjambi Karunga, is both the bringer of evil and its avenger... (*GR*, p. 323)

The Moon becomes yet another example of the conflicted duality of the novel. It is at once a mythical redeemer of man, but also a symbol of death, or at least the location of an eventual, Gnostic 'heat-death'. At first glance, this bifurcation of lunar themes supports the concept of a neat division between the Gnostic and primordial, analysing the Moon in Pynchon's work creates a much more complex image. The Schwarzkommando's desire to learn the truth of the Moon leads them to find a Merkabah of their own – the Rocket 00001 – which exists in antithesis to Blicero's own Rocket, but still appears to operate within the confines of Gnosticism. The Gnosticism

of the Hereros acts as a heretical act against the Gnosticism of the master control system, and therefore may contain some theological value for the preterite.

The appropriation of the Gnostic Feminine

The spiritual feminine constitutes a part of Gnosticism in Pynchon. The feminine as symbolic of life in animism becomes subverted by Gnostic control into its opposite, as displayed in *V*, where the feminine is reduced to the mechanical. The affirmation of the feminine as life-bringing is suppressed, as we can see in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Detectives Harvey Speed and Floyd Perdoo are investigating Slothrop's sexual adventures and encounter a melon at a market in which 'as among craters of the pale moon, a face is indeed emerging, the face of a captive woman with eyes cast downward, lids above as smooth as Persian ceilings...' (*GR*, p. 271) A glimpse of the feminine aspect of the Moon is shown, but captive, repressed and powerless.

The Moon as a feminine symbol is typically pagan/animistic, but also appears in Gnosticism, most interestingly as a key component to Merkabah mysticism. In Hellenic Gnosticism gnosis is laden with sexual imagery, where the feminine is a mediator between man and God, the female functioning as (according to Hans Jonas) 'the soul's intercourse with God.'¹¹⁷ This of course is in contradiction to Eddin's interpretation of oppressive Gnosticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, commonly depicted as a declaration of masculine power, with the phallic imagery of the Rocket at its core ('...the fantastic, virile roar. Your ears nearly burst. Cruel, hard, thrusting into the virgin-blue robes of the

¹¹⁷ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 283.

sky...' (GR, p. 464)). The character of Pynchon's Gnostic control system is entirely masculine, with the Rocket as the absolute symbol of masculinity, its 'feminine counterpart' (GR, p. 223) figured as the submissive earth it penetrates. This division between masculine and feminine becomes explicit in a passage depicting Blicero (as Weissmann) first bringing Enzian to Europe:

It began when Weissmann brought him to Europe: a discovery that love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded, in his own case, that he enter the service of the Rocket. . . . Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature... (GR, p. 325)

Masculinity forms both the core of the gnosis of control, and the chief character of the oppressive European control systems themselves. Gershom Scholem the eminent scholar of Jewish mysticism, states that Kabbalah seeks to establish the existence of a feminine aspect of God, incorporated into the idea of the 'Shekhinah'. The Shekhinah is the light of God that can be witnessed by man, meaning *dwelling*, and is the Jewish term for the manifest presence of God. Kabbalah interpreted the Shekhinah as having a feminine aspect, becoming 'the symbol of "eternal womanhood"'¹¹⁸. Sexual union in Kabbalah was revered as a symbolic unity between masculine God and feminine Shekhinah, 'every true marriage is a symbolic realization of the union of God with the Shekhinah.'¹¹⁹ This notion *thus* refutes the masculine Gnosticism of *Gravity's Rainbow's* villains, where sexuality is consistently linked with destruction, be it the Rocket's aggressive impact with the Earth, or Blicero's homosexually inclined

¹¹⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 230.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 235.

mediations with control and power. During a sequence when Slothrop finds a newspaper article about the Hiroshima bombing, the picture of the mushroom cloud:

In one of these streets, in the morning fog, plastered over two slippery cobblestones, is a scrap of newspaper headline, with a wirephoto of a giant white cock, dangling in the sky straight downward out of a white pubic bush.' (*GR*, p. 693)

The sexual aggression of the simile is increased with the introduction of a perverse vision of the White Goddess, acting not as a symbol of life, but as a harbinger of doom:

At the instant it happened, the pale Virgin was rising in the east, head, shoulders, breasts, 17° 36' down to her maidenhead at the horizon. A few doomed Japanese knew of her as some Western deity. She loomed in the eastern sky gazing down at the city about to be sacrificed... (*GR*, p. 694)

The twinning of the male symbol (usually the Rocket, this time the iconic explosion itself) with the female coming together with destructive force, suggests a perversion of the Shekhinah. The bomb becomes a perverse sexual act, with the virginity of the feminine at the point of the bomb's impact. What is presented here is an appropriation of the concept of sex being a mediation with God, where instead a display of sexuality conjures a particularly European approximation of God, a terrible spectre of death and destruction that mirrors the death-worship that comes with the oppressive forms of Gnosticism and Calvinism in the novel.

There are numerous other incidents in *Gravity's Rainbow* where we see the master control system manipulating feminine divinity into the demonic. Steven Weisenburger identifies the presence of the Shekhinah in *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* as 'the earthly presence of Jahweh, usually the last of his ten emanations, or *Sephiroth*, and it is

a feminine presence.¹²⁰ He (via Scholem) explains that in Kabbalah the Shekhinah is present in vessels cast into a diaspora, and this 'light of God' is visible in some of the female characters within the novel. Once again, the Moon motif returns:

The proper home of the *Shekhinah* is with the sun, symbol of Jahweh's masculine light. But she also has a dark side, appearing as the Moon, a lightless receiver of light. As such, she is especially susceptible to domination from demonic powers from the Other Side, when she appears as the tree of death, symbol of punishment and retribution.¹²¹

Weisenburger is expressing exactly the point I have made earlier; the manipulation of a potentially salvific Gnostic concept towards a controlling and 'demonic' one. This is clear, again in the Hiroshima bomb passage, where the symbol tree of punishment and retribution is expressly referenced; 'It is not only a sudden white genital onset in the sky – it is also, perhaps, a Tree...' (*GR*, p. 694) Demiurgic power once again displaces the feminine, expressing it solely as its evil other, an image of violence and destruction.

This 'dark side' of Gnostic femininity is heavily associated with the colour black. When dressed in his transsexual garb during the sexual role-play parody of Hansel and Gretel that Blicero undertakes with Katje and Gottfried, he wears a 'false cunt and a merkin of sable' (*GR*, p. 95), and his own violent persona of the Shekhinah comes with a synthetic vagina covered with 'tiny blades of stainless steel' that Katje 'is obliged to cut her lips and tongue' (*GR*, p. 95) upon. Katje herself later takes on the persona of Dominus Nocturna during the psychological torture of Brigadier Ernest Pudding. She is naked except for 'a long sable cape and black boots with court heels' (*GR*, p. 223), and 'her pubic hair has been dyed black for the occasion.' (*GR*, p. 235) Her sexual organs are framed in black, not representative of life, but shown as a nihilistic void, a 'fearful

¹²⁰ Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 218.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 218.

vortex.' (GR, p. 235) Katje's Shekhinah is an angel of death, keeping Pudding under Their control by appealing to his own fantasies of death, here manifest in his trauma from the death he witness during the First World War. This of course comes to an apex when he is commanded to consume Katje's shit, a grimly erotic act that symbolises Pudding's punishment, the eating of the preterite war-dead. Dominus Nocturna reminds Pudding of the angel of death he saw on the fields of Passchendaele: 'Through the periscope, underneath a star shell that hung in the sky, he saw her . . . and though he was hidden, she saw Pudding. Her face was pale, she was dressed all in black, she stood in No-man's Land, the machine guns raked their patterns all around her, but she needed no protection.' (GR, p. 234) The star depicted as a shell appears to reference the Shekhinah directly, suggesting a broken vessel that has deposited the Shekhinah there on the battlefield. The myth of the *plemora* is clearly in Pynchon's mind at this point.

The black-clad negative Shekhinah appears again in the form of Greta Erdmann, the semi-pornographic horror star of Reich-era Germany. She is reminiscent of Lilith, Adam's first wife who was depicted as a 'demonic female spirit known for haunting children.'¹²² Indeed, her demonic status is alluded to often as she is depicted as eating Jewish children, both invoking Jewish mythology and typical Germanic tropes of fairy-tale witches. In one incident where she confronts a child, she can see this:

Her voice began its rise, and the boy his trembling. "You have been in exile too long." it was a loud clap in the dusk. "Come home, with me," she cried, "back to your people." Now he was trying to break away, but her hand, her gloved hand, her claw had flown out and seized his arm. "Little piece of Jewish shit. Don't try to run away from me."

"No..." but at the very end rising, in a provocative question.

"You know who I am, too. My home is the form of light," burlesquing it now, in heavy Yiddish dialect, actressy and false, "I wander all the Diaspora looking for strayed children. I am Israel. I am the Shekhinah, queen,

¹²² Ibid, p. 277.

daughter, bride and mother of God. And I will take you back, you fragment of smashed vessel, even if I must pull you by your nasty little circumcised penis -" (*GR*, p. 478)

Of course, Pynchon's explicit reference to the Shekhinah is obvious, but the way it plays out here is interesting. She is the corruption of the Shekhinah absolute, becoming a monstrous entity that feeds off the Semitic beliefs she misappropriates. No longer is the Shekhinah the embodiment of the consolidation of Israel, but an enemy of such, taking the children in blood sacrifice. But this is more than perversion, Erdmann is precisely the reverse image of potentially salvific tropes in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Weisenburger states, her name ('earth-man') gives her a 'connection with the preterite mud,'¹²³ but instead of being one of the passed over masses, she is shown as a demonic figure that haunts them. In the same fashion she is transformed into this 'preterite demon', she also situates the potential qualities within Gnosticism as demonic too. However, Erdmann's demonic character is strongly expressed as theatre, an extension of her movie horror persona. Her accent is shown as campy and theatrical; we are reminded in her depiction of the schlock horror of the thirties. Erdmann's turn as the Shekhinah that symbolises death is a simulacrum of a particular approach to Gnosticism that the master control system wishes to promote.

These three examples of the Shekhinah in the novel (Blicero in drag, Katje as Dominus Nocturna, and Greta Erdmann) represent not only the theological dark side of the concept of the Shekhinah, but the Shekhinah as transmitted through a particular European sense of Gnostic control. All three are simulations of the 'tree of death,'¹²⁴ each of them is acting a role.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 218.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 218.

These roles are appropriated forms of the Shekhinah as a method of control, but in *Against the Day*, we see the Shekhinah having a salvific function. Cyprian Latewood enters a three-way relationship with Yashmeen Halfcourt and Reef Traverse, idolising Yashmeen as a Shekhinah figure. The narrative between Cyprian and Yashmeen at first mirrors Pudding and Katje: Yashmeen commands Cyprian, exchanges in sadomasochistic sexual behaviour, and Cyprian has an unwavering devotion to her: 'his eyes remained adoringly lifted to Yashmeen alone, except for the times when she commanded him to direct them elsewhere.' (*AtD*, p. 877) However, there is something different at work here, a relationship that is not framed around control and oppression, but instead is depicted as loving, caring, and entering a politics of responsibility and selflessness that both mirrors and opposes the Dominus Nocturna passage of *Gravity's Rainbow*. This is 'more than the usual history of flogging one expected from British schoolboys of all ages.' (*AtD*, p. 877)

While both Cyprian and Pudding debase themselves before an image of the Shekhinah, Cyprian's is referred to as 'a religious surrender of the self.' (*AtD*, p. 876) Pudding's self-deprecating acts with Katje are a ritualised flagellation of his own trauma, a guiltiness that he refuses (and isn't allowed to by the White Visitation) to let go. Cyprian's motives are opposite, he devotes himself not out of sexual slavery or a desire to transfigure his own trauma, but to abandon himself, dedicate himself to the members of his community. In 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: the Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon's Ecological Ethic,' Christopher Coffman explores Cyprian's spiritual progression via this surrender to the Shekhinah.

Cyprian has begun to understand that his appetites define him and that what he most valued in his surrender to them was the surrender *of* them, by means

of a paradoxically indulgent asceticism that permitted an escape from need and the ego at the very moment need and the ego were offered an opportunity for satisfaction.¹²⁵

Coffman claims that Cyprian's devotion to Yashmeen as Shekhinah causes him to move from a secular figure to that of a priest, and begin his transcendent passage. This is achieved by Pynchon doubling back on the oppressive Shekhinah motifs of *Gravity's Rainbow* and adopting a Bogomil concept of Gnosticism. As Coffman writes, Bogomilism 'ascribes the role of the demiurge to a reflective female counterpart of God', and Cyprian achieves his transcendence via 'a declaration of allegiance to a female transcendent.'¹²⁶ Pynchon in *Against the Day* addresses the Shekhinah now as a genuine feminine counterpart to the aggressive and masculine theology of the Rocket, and Yashmeen becomes the antithesis of the simulated Shekhinahs of Katje and Greta, and 'Cyprian's dedication to Yashmeen is likewise devotion to the creator of our world, as that creator is delineated by Bogomil doctrine.'¹²⁷ The feminine of the Gnostic is explored in this section of *Against the Day* and Pynchon's doubling technique offers us a counterpart to the Gnostic as masculine and phallic Rocket. Pynchon permits Cyprian to see the feminine as a spiritual object, infused with the same Gnostic theology that also promoted the violence of a Gnostic master control system towards a feminine Earth. Cyprian's own gender is constantly relocated throughout his narrative. He begins as a male, is transformed to a sexual mediator when he impregnates Yashmeen orally, after fellating Reef, and then takes on a feminine aspect as he transcends into the

¹²⁵ Christopher K. Coffman, 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: The Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon's Ecological Ethic', in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (ed.), *Pynchon's Against the Day: a Corrupted Pilgrims Guide* (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.99.

¹²⁶Ibid, pp. 98-99.

¹²⁷Ibid, p. 99.

Bogomil convent. As I have discussed, the feminine counterpart of the Gnostic has been violated and manipulated by its masculine counterpart, but now in *Against the Day*, Pynchon gives it room to breathe, and positions it as a genuine preterite spirituality.

This reversal of Gnosticism as preterite space has an ecological angle, as Cyprian descends, like Orpheus, into the Earth, via the mountain that the Bogomil convent is placed on. This preterite and feminine Gnosticism is paradoxically paired with Orphism, a spiritual view that Eddins perceived as a counterpoint to it, as Cyprian's 'former experience predisposed him to turn to the female principle as an object of veneration and imitation [and his relationship with Yashmeen as the Shekhinah] offers him the intermediate step between worship of the feminine and devotion to a chthonic cult.'¹²⁸ Cyprian's Gnostic retreat is thus framed with an underground spatial element that links it to both Pynchon's interest in burial and the preterite Earth, and animistic subterranean space that I will be focusing on in detail in the following chapter.

Before I continue into a discussion of the animist, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the implications of Cyprian's Shekhinah narrative beyond Pynchon's typical doubling technique of constantly critiquing and valorizing doctrines. The relationship between him and Yashmeen also engages with Pynchon's wider ethical concerns, the concept of care and sacrifice within a postsecular community. Cyprian's denial of the self in favour of his lover, almost Buddhist in its denial of desire and identity, structures his surrender to Yashmeen as a vital sense of responsibility to family and community. While the Pudding passage in *Gravity's Rainbow* overly displays an unequal power balance of control and manipulation, Yashmeen and Cyprian appear as equals, playing through sadomasochistic sexual games out of obligation to each other. Yashmeen indeed threatens him with 'such a thrashing,' (*AtD*, p. 877) but there is a mutual

¹²⁸Ibid, p. 102.

exchange of needs at work. '[Cyprian] endured it, not so much as it was her will as, unbelievably, what had become her need, how could he disappoint her need?' He overhears her praising him, a declaration of a devotion *back* to Cyprian that 'no formal cruelties she might devise for his penance [could] quite cancel his memory of her undissembled need.' (*AtD*, p. 878.) This touching moment of selfless love references back to Thantatz's theory of S and M in *Gravity's Rainbow* being considered a resistant act:

“But why are we taught to feel reflexive shame whenever the subject comes up? Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behavior but that one? Because submission and dominance are resources it needs for its very survival. They cannot be wasted in private sex. In any kind of sex. It needs our submission so that it may remain in power. It needs our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game. There is no joy in it, only power. I tell you, if S and M could be established universally, at the family level, the State would wither away.” (*GR*, p. 736)

Yashmeen and Cyprian's sadomasochistic games both celebrate a sense of communal obligation and also remove the power structures of control and dominance from it in a resistant act against the master control system. Cyprian does not submit to a “lust after dominance” or to any hierarchical power, but to a desire to please and care for the woman he loves. It is this appropriation and reordering of power that grants postsecular communities and postsecular relationships their salvific power.

CHAPTER THREE

Animism and the Transmission of the Magical

In the previous chapters, I have shown how Pynchon uses religious frameworks to depict the secular orthodoxy that the postsecular modes of the novel are either oppressed by or resistant against. In this chapter, I will explore how Pynchon moves away from spiritual resistance as a mimetic process, and show the progression towards using alternative and complete spiritual systems that are sourced from outside of a Eurocentric paradigm. Secondly, I will make the claim that this apparent expansion of Pynchon's religious vision allows for further reconsiderations of the secular, and how they display a resistant 'magic' property in *Against the Day*. Overall, this chapter will engage with two particular aspects of spirituality in Pynchon:

- i) The role of animistic thought and how it both acts as a conduit for Pynchon's critical sense of nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian, prehistoric past, and also functions as the direct opposite of the European Calvinist/Gnostic singularity I have already covered. I will explore how animism works as a radical departure from the prior Calvinist/Gnostic negotiations with resistance and moves towards finding postsecular spaces in other, more separated theological structures. This will include an exploration of how animism is a resistant component of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and how this transmits to his most recent larger novel, *Against the Day*.
- ii) If animism reflects out an opposite but viable method of considering the world through its irrational and magic tropes, how does magic in general function as a resistant method in *Against the Day*? Magic as an expression

of spiritual resistance infuses not just the animistic, but also new considerations such as technology and science. I will aim to show how Pynchon's more recent and focused engagement with 'magic' allows us to explore more viable and functional resistant methods.

In the previous chapters I have laid out how Pynchon delineates modes of control; they appear secular but are in fact deeply rooted in these orthodox and monolithic religious traditions, which in turn become corrupted through their use for control, oppression and violence. While I have shown how Pynchon frames political and ideological power through a spiritual prism, I have also presented a 'doubling' process at work within the theologies used that go some way to work as counterpoints to these oppressive singularities, finding moments of multiplicity and heterodoxy that work to undermine the master control system (preterition acting as liberation through exclusion, the nostalgic alternative histories of Gnosticism highlighting the misappropriation of said religious structure, to loosely recap).

While we have seen that in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon is beginning to express notions of spiritual resistance to counter the antagonistic religious orthodoxy, these relationships still often appear to be unbalanced, where the salvific 'flip-side' of the doctrines exist only as a brief respite from such overwhelming power structures, a resistant power which still appears wanting for some power. Pynchon's appropriation of Calvinist and Gnostic doctrine creates salvific *moments* in the briefest sense; they are transitory, small and unsustainable, never allowing for a consistent or real sense of resistance against a perceived world purely in the thrall of a singular mode of theological thought. Pynchon is still compromising spiritual salvation against the rigidity and presence of oppressive and controlling systems. With having potentially redemptive moments being acted out *within* confines of such theologies, they lack a

solid centre, and alienate the option for a spiritual alternative that is a coherent, outside presence. Pynchon is still trapped in what Dwight Eddins refers to as a 'cabalistic modality'.¹²⁹ The salvific content is compromised as it conducts itself within the boundaries of two ultimately antagonistic and oppressive starting points (Calvinism and Gnosticism), and thus appears as 'scraps' of these, untenable for determining a sustained discourse on the possibility of a spiritual salvation.

However, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in a progression previously unseen in his previous works (V., *The Crying of Lot 49* and in a chronological sense, the short stories in *Slow Learner*) towards just that: a spiritual exploration that exists outside of the twin oppressive doctrines of Calvinism and Gnosticism and challenges their shared focus on an aggressive ascetic retreat from the world and forms a powerful resistance force against them. This is present in *Gravity's Rainbow* as an emergent discourse with Animism. Pynchon's relationship with nature as a spiritual presence in his work is a slow-burning one, an element within his work that slowly takes shape and transforms across the breadth of his corpus, even beyond *Gravity's Rainbow* as we shall see later in this chapter. The roots of this exploration begin in *Slow Learner*, a retrospective collection of Pynchon's journeyman short stories published in 1984 where Pynchon's early nihilistic world-view (as I have covered in the previous chapter) means that nature was originally conceived as a zone of particular Conradian menace, antithetical to the salvific concerns we see later in his work. Eddins refers to nature in *Slow Learner* at its most threatening as 'vistas of demiurgic evil'¹³⁰, with Pynchon adopting a particularly Gnostic viewpoint of nature, as an alien and demonic element in the texts. Even at his most ambiguous, the younger Pynchon still sees nature as appearing 'intractable and

¹²⁹ Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, p. 28.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 32.

aggressive'¹³¹. In 'The Small Rain' Nathan Levine watches the army drag the bodies of hurricane victims – literally killed by natural forces – out of an 'unstirred and reeking' (SL, p.47) swamp. The rest of the short stories' environment seems to be in a deathly oppressive stasis, reminiscent of Conrad's jungle in *Heart of Darkness*, static with a 'dumb immobility'¹³².

However, in (the later written) *Low-Lands*, Dennis Flange's 'womb with a view' (SL, p.55) does suggest a union with nature, as Flange is emotionally connected to his warren-like home 'by an umbilical cord woven of lichen and sedge, furze and gorse.' Eddins believes this is the first trace of a 'significant anti-Gnostic affirmation' in Pynchon's work, where we see an 'early projection of primordial Earth as beneficent origin rather than neutral (or demiurgic) wasteland.'¹³³ This image of the Earth itself as a salvific zone opposes the notion of the Earth as an alien menace (as we see in *The Small Rain*), and also begins to see the spatial positioning of salvific zones as *buried*, subterranean places that exist out of sight against the master control system. Where later in *Gravity's Rainbow* we encounter the almost prophetic scene of the preterite 'coal-tar' erupting from the Earth, in *Low-Lands* we meet the meeker but hopeful image of a rat named Hyacinth, the classical symbol of rebirth.

This antithetical drive to Pynchon's Gnostic concerns hums by the background of his first two novels, surfacing most cogently in *V.* when Fausto Majistral contemplates the Maltese sewers as the kingdom of life. The notion of a salvific 'kingdom of life' only exists as a separate, robust theological system when we come to *Gravity's Rainbow*, something more akin to animistic concerns. Through a deeper discourse with the concept of a 'sentient Earth', Pynchon begins to align the natural world with themes that

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 31.

¹³² Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899 (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 36.

¹³³ Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, p. 39.

have come to be indicative of how he figures salvation, resistance and redemption: unity, escape, chaos, multiplicity and the concept of community. It is in this novel that Eddins sees the emergence of his 'Orphic naturalism' concept (see chapter two), an idea that provides us with a fair framework for considering this emergent valorisation of nature:

The principal exponent of this religion in *Gravity's Rainbow* – a religion I shall refer to as Orphic naturalism – is the author-persons himself, but he allows several characters experiences of transport in which they are profoundly affected by the perception of a sentient Earth and of ultimate union with it.¹³⁴

The chief component of Eddins' Orphic naturalism is the concept of the Earth as a deific force in itself, as opposed to prior notions that natural world is an alien, chaotic and prehistoric menace. The Earth as a divine entity is depicted as welcoming, fostering a promise of unity and communion, virtues that were previous buried beneath the oppressive nihilism of a 'Gnostic Pynchon'.

Kathryn Hume in *Pynchon's Mythography* states that *Gravity's Rainbow* is an 'origins-to-apocalypse story'¹³⁵ in that the mythic scope of the novel's cosmology spans the prehistoric origins of the Earth, through to a prophetic vision of the entropic heat-death of the world through machinations of the Gnostic/Calvinist Cartel. Pynchon's epoch-spanning text allows him to enter a discourse with the prehistoric origins of the Earth, and how it relates to his own critical view on the progression and potential future of the world. A common trope (which we have engaged with already via Molly Hite) is this concept of there being a 'holy centre' at the heart of each of his texts, be that a locus of revelation and understanding that Oedipa seeks in *The Crying of Lot 49*, or Stencil's

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 111.

¹³⁵ Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography*, p. 22.

desire to find the woman V in V. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, this 'origin point' appears as a temporal one, the distant prehistoric world itself. In a world that is typically fractured and lacking solid connectivity, *Gravity's Rainbow* frames the prehistoric as the 'single root lost' (GR, p. 518), and the point in which history begins to split apart into a fractal separation. This concept of a point in time that was holistic, a place where all things were unified together, is a keystone in how salvific (and the desire for salvation) material works in the novel. The Zone itself is a transitory place, fragile and doomed to collapse, but it shares this same property with how prehistory functions in the text. It acts a surrogate prehistoric origin point, a microcosmic place where all the preterite people are unified together for a brief moment in time. It, like the primeval past, is a pre-lapsarian space that for a moment holds some virtue until it succumbs to the corrupting entropy of (a particular Western) sense of temporal progression.

Separations are proceeding. Each alternative Zone speeds away from all the others, in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center. Each day the mythical return Enzian dreamed of seems less possible. Once it was necessary to know uniforms, insignia, airplane markings, to observe boundaries. But by now too many choices have been made. The single root lost, way back there in the May desolation. Each bird has his branch now, and each one is the Zone. (GR, p. 519)

The concept of potentially salvific origin points dissolving and collapsing via the progression of time feeds back in to Pynchon's critical view of the Western perspective of time and progress (via the Enlightenment, mostly) that I have already discussed in detail in chapter one. Pynchon sees the concept of one-way time as a destructive act upon the world, with history accelerating away from an original point of unity with no hope of a return to it. If the prehistoric past is indeed a pre-lapsarian space, then the Western imposition of one-way time takes on the role of that irredeemable lapse.

It is this relationship to time that is one of the reasons that Pynchon's adoption of animism is so important when considering how it functions as a complete redemptive spirituality. As I stated in chapter two, Eddins and Hume both point out that *Gravity's Rainbow* is a novel that uses mirroring to show the relationships between power and resistance. True resistance in Pynchon's texts is often portrayed as antithetical to the system it is resisting. Animism in this sense is the complete mirror-image of the Calvinist/Gnostic master control system. Both in Pynchon's texts and outside of it, animism posits an alternative system of viewing time that rejects the Rilkean slogan of 'Once, only once...' (*GR*, p. 413) that becomes the mantra of Western thought. With his appropriation of animism as an alternative and resistant spirituality, Pynchon is also deviating from Western spiritual systems, and investing in the radically different spiritualities of a wider world, what Hume calls 'a third kind of territory'¹³⁶. The non-Western, animistic point of view sees time as a cyclical progression, allowing for a potential natural return to a pre-lapsarian origin. Hume calls these spiritualities 'ahistorical, cyclical, and, in some senses, free.' However, the stability of these animistic zones is in doubt in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The master control system's claim on the singular truth of a spiritual world often leads such animistic communities in the novel are violently dispossessed. We see the Herero (we will return to them in detail later) spiritual system blurring with Gnostic Rocket mysticism as an acceptance of their relocation and death at the loss of a cyclical way of life. The Khirgiz tribes are massacred in Russia, and the Gaucho anarchism is brought to heel ('But even the freest of Gauchos end up selling out, you know. That's how things are.' (*GR*, p. 388)). They

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 39.

are less viable options for a renegotiation with the fundamentals of the world, but ‘reminders of lost options’¹³⁷.

While Hume argues that the animistic material appears as merely the ghost of prior approaches now long gone, I counter that animism itself offers us a useful system of critiquing the master control system that goes beyond the preterite losses depicted in the immediate text. The acknowledgement of other, non-Western, approaches to spiritual thought is in itself a resistant act which arms the preterite with a potent alternative to their preterition, a ‘reminder of the absent pattern denied to us in our control-ridden societies’¹³⁸. What I will endeavour to present in this chapter is not how animism is repressed by the master control system (this approach has been covered both by various critics and obliquely by my discussion of Western spiritual dominance in the previous chapters), but how it provides us with a useful and perhaps powerful set of tools for exploring a more viable approach to spiritual resistance in Pynchon’s work, ones that allow a wider view that bleeds into discussions on magical resistance, a potentially eco-critical Pynchon and even approaches to a socio-political discourse.

Now that I have a brief overview of Pynchon’s transition from his earlier nihilistic Gnostic viewpoint to a wider and more inclusive engagement with animism, we can move on to how Pynchon is using a more global and multitudinous incorporation of spiritual possibilities to undermine the singular doctrines of the master control system. Before I finally break away from my analysis of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and into Pynchon’s much more recent work on animism in 2006’s *Against the Day*, it is worth re-visiting one of the more popular aspects of the novel that has been a part of Pynchon criticism since the first wave: The Hereros. The Hereros appear explicitly in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 39.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 40.

but their presence represents a much wider concern that has its genesis in Pynchon's early Conradian colonialist view of the world beyond Europe (the primitive, savage world envisioned by the colonial mind-set, if you will) that we have seen in *Slow Learner*. Pynchon's use of the Hereros is part of a wider and on-going discourse with Africa and European colonial attitudes towards it. This concern with Africa can be traced from the Sudwest material in *V.* which serves as a prototype for the Herero content, to discussions on slavery in *Mason & Dixon*.

The African concerns of Pynchon suggest an interesting post-colonialist reading of this material. Instead of reversing colonial attitudes they are instead subversively *reinforced*, granting the 'third territory' a degree of power over the European master control system, due to the latter's inherent terror of the alternative spiritual power that Africa (and by extension, the rest of the global 'Other' theological systems). 'Blackness' does indeed suggest a racial fear in *Gravity's Rainbow*, from Malcolm X's attempted rape of Slothrop to Pudding's imagining of a turd as a 'Negro's penis, [...] the image of a Brute African who will make him behave...' (*GR*, p. 236) These uncomfortable moments of racist stereotyping – the brute African native, the black city hoodlum – channel this inherent racial fear that exists in the Western mind, a deeper psychosis that stems not just from the guilt of exploitation, but the terror of the formerly exploited taking revenge, the liberated turning on the oppressors. Pynchon handles this deftly, providing the reader with the African as a 'bogeyman' that has become fetishized as a terrifying, and masochistically erotic, figure. While there is ample material for a political reading of race¹³⁹, what becomes more relevant is this notion that this perceived savagery has, in itself, a resistant quality.

¹³⁹ For compelling research on Pynchon's racial politics, see Joanna Freer's 'Thomas Pynchon and the Black Panther Party: Revolutionary Suicide in *Gravity's Rainbow*'.

The world animism posited by Pynchon is anathema to the European mind-set, an alien status that appears to grant it a resistant power that is opposite to the reductive and deprecating process of colonialism. This subverted power relationship allows for animism to flourish *as* an alternative system, and creates the option to discuss the power dynamics that allow elements like magic to also enter a resistant spiritual discourse. I will be returning to how concepts of 'magic' are used in Pynchon's portrayal of spiritual resistance and its relationship and reliance of animism later in this chapter, but for now, I must look at the Hereros to examine the resistant qualities of animism itself.

The Hereros and Western Critique

While it is established that Herero content in Pynchon's corpus has caught critical imaginations of many scholars in the initial first wave of Pynchon criticism, much of it coalesced into one concluding strand: The Herero stands for both the oppressive nature of the West and its colonial ideology upon the multitudinous world, and the suicide of the people an acquiescence of the marginalised towards a singular European hegemony. This paradigm began to be addressed and reconsidered.

William Plater in *The Grim Phoenix* discusses in depth the death culture that surrounds the Herero culture portrayed in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The 'Empty Ones' become a culture of people who have converted their anthropological and theological world into one that embraces their own death and inevitable destruction. Plater determines the Zone-Hereros to be, like the mirroring relationship we have seen with Eddins and Hume, a mirrored truth of the oppressive powers. He calls them 'the colonial

policy stripped of all illusion; no transcendence, transformation, or transfiguration.¹⁴⁰ They become both a sacrifice made to promote the oppressive singularity of the master control system, and a damning testament to their machinations. The Herero can be read as a hyperbolic example of the preterite masses, with their concept of *mba-kayere* (I am passed over) suggesting a certain complicity in this status.

However, while Plater cements the Hereros very much as images of death and death-worship, Hume suggests some resistant or redemptive path in the act of preterition. 'What the preterite condition seems to mean to Pynchon is a form of openness that lets one respond to the needs of others and to the transempirical phenomena.'¹⁴¹ Of course, we have seen in prior chapters how preterition can represent a form of possible freedom, a multitudinous (if fleeting) position of options. While Plater suggests that the unison between the Rocket symbolism and the Herero religion is a deathly mimicry of one's oppressors, Hume considers the resistant purpose of the Hereros in *Gravity's Rainbow*. She invokes Enzian's speech regarding the Rocket, claiming 'by giving up our claim to protection – and after all, as Enzian notes, nothing can protect us from death – we open ourselves to possibilities of touch and contact, with others and with the Other Side.'¹⁴² I will reproduce the section she references here for clarity:

"It comes as the Revealer. Showing that no society can protect, never could – they are as foolish as shields of paper..." He must tell Christian everything he knows, everything he suspects or has dreamed. Proclaiming none of it for truth. But he must keep nothing back for himself. Nothing is his to keep. "They have lied to us. They can't keep us from dying, so they lie to us about death. A cooperative structure of lies. What have They ever given us in return for the trust, the love – They actually say 'love' – we're supposed to owe Them? Can They keep us from even catching cold? From

¹⁴⁰ Plater, *The Grim Phoenix*, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography*, p. 61.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 61.

lice, from being alone? From *anything*? Before the Rocket we went on believing, because we wanted to. But the Rocket can penetrate, from the sky, at any given point. Nowhere is safe. We can't believe Them anymore. Not if we are still sane, and love the truth." (GR, p. 726)

Here we see the voice of the multiplicity coming through via Enzian, in what Joseph Slade calls 'Pynchon's almost Emersonian faith in the unity of Creation'¹⁴³ It is this affirmation of animistic ideas that forms the structure of the cultural ideology of the Herero, which allows then the ability to perform their cultural suicide. We see the opposition here between two cultural viewpoints of death – the Herero concept of life as a mass beyond the temporal and individual nature of the human, and the Western fetishism of the finality of individual death. Hume's analysis of the Herero issue is somewhat kinder, proclaiming them revolutionaries of truth rather than Plater's much more pessimistic reading of their role as victims. Hume is somewhat more positive, proclaiming them as revolutionaries of truth rather than Plater's much more pessimistic reading of their role as victims.

While Hume and Plater offer us an interesting understanding of how to place the Herero in Pynchon's view of transcendent possibilities, it is Steven Weisenburger who richly explores the bibliographical details of the Herero content in Pynchon's text. From Weisenburger's work in this area, we can draw some more nuanced conclusions about Pynchon's complex use of the Herero.

In what seems an aside in his *Companion to Gravity's Rainbow*, Weisenburger invokes the German anthropologist H.G. Luttig as a potential source on the Hereros that Pynchon used.

¹⁴³ Joseph Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex, and Love in Gravity's Rainbow". *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), p. 153.

Luttig clarifies why, for the Hereros, a plan involving “tribal suicide” might be construed as an act of “political struggle.” The reason is that for them suicide could also be an act of “blood-vengeance.” He explains: “A person who commits suicide under these circumstances is also actuated by the thought that the dead are capable of bringing about evil and death more effectively than the living.” If so, imagine the whole tribe going into an avenging battle from the Other Side.¹⁴⁴

This seems like a playful musing by Weisenburger, but instead is drawn from Weisenburger’s exhaustive study of the anthropological influence of Pynchon’s depiction and use of Herero culture. Three years prior to the *Companion* being published, the sixteenth edition of *Pynchon Notes* contained his essay ‘Pynchon’s Hereros: A Textual and Bibliographical Note’.

Weisenburger opens the essay with the mention of Pynchon’s letter to Thomas F Hirsch (of which we will come to later) regarding the Hereros, and continues to trace their presence in the texts. Weisenburger then continues to focus on Luttig as the main source of the Herero material. He states Luttig is ‘uninfected by the colonialist fever’¹⁴⁵ and ‘Instead, Luttig turns a cool eye on the ways in which Herero cosmology and its social expressions, once a unified structuralisation of dichotomies, fell to pieces under the ruling hand of European culture.’¹⁴⁶ Of course, it is this shared mentality that connected with Pynchon, allowing him to shape the Herero as a radical opposition to Europe.

While there is no real purpose for me to go over Weisenburger’s extensive 1985 research, is it worth extracting the concept of vengeance through suicide, as it provides a new angle of approach on not just the Hereros (who have been extensively written

¹⁴⁴ Wiesenburger, p. 162.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen Wiesenburger, ‘Pynchon’s Hereros: A Textual and Bibliographical Note’, *Pynchon Notes* 16, ed. by John Kraft, 1985, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

upon) but perhaps more on the nature of the Other (for instance, Hume's *third Territory*) and its function within the texts.

Weisenburger's essay returns often to the mythology of the Herero, both the spatial mythological detail (the importance of the compass points that Pynchon ties sublimely to the rocket fins of the V2) and the deities of Murkuru and Ndjambi Karunga (the creator god). These identifications, while exhaustively exhumed from Luttig and Pynchon's texts, need some more unpacking, in order to see how Weisenburger's discoveries affect the view of the Pynchonian Herero.

The concept of intentional tribal suicide is one that occurs repeatedly in Pynchon scholarship. Joseph Slade muses on it in the previously mentioned essay 'Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in *Gravity's Rainbow*', in conjunction with the famous Hirsch letter. He writes: 'Collective suicide, envisioned as a return to unity, seemed plausible considering their understanding of a holistic universe.'¹⁴⁷ Slade's analysis of the Herero in Pynchon is divided between the Hereros as a morbid mimicry of the West and this more redemptive *return to unity*. At first Slade describes them as resistant to the cancerous western culture thrust upon them: 'Even in their captivity, the Schwarzkommandos of *Gravity's Rainbow* remain partly underacinated, having managed despite their training as rocket experts to cling to vestiges of tribal life.' He then supports the theory that the Herero *embrace* their preterition (mba-kayere) as a 'moment of stillness' and continues to highlight the confusion that exists around such a thesis: 'The posture [the acceptance of preterition in order to exist outside of history] is ambiguous, however, because it resembles a Western yearning for stasis.'¹⁴⁸ These two aspects of 'stillness' and 'stasis' do require some definition in relation to Pynchon's

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Slade, 'Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in *Gravity's Rainbow*', *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State, 1983), p. 161.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.161.

texts. The stillness of the Herero is one of unity and cycle, whereas the stillness (stasis) of the West is one of death, vacuum and Gnostic remoteness from the physical. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, we see the dichotomy between a Western linear progression of time and the more cyclical approach of animism.

Slade is correct to say that 'the distinction that Pynchon attempts teeters on subtlety, for he wishes to draw a line between the Herero desire to commit tribal suicide as a form of return and the erotic love of death the narrator believes has infected Western culture.'¹⁴⁹ However, with Weisenburger's extensive research into Pynchon's Herero origins we can shed some more light on this teetering problem.

Weisenburger does suggest in the *Gravity's Rainbow Companion* that the suicide of the Herero people in Pynchon's novels is instead a form of attack, a resistance born out of a particular spiritual belief system, instead of an acceptance of cultural defeat. To paraphrase Weisenburger, the notion of suicide in Herero spirituality was one of vengeance, an attack stemming from beyond the grave. Weisenburger did indeed support this with some compelling information from H.G. Luttig's *The Religious System and Organisation of the Herero*, cited by Pynchon himself as a direct source in the famous Hirsch Letter. I will quote the passage cited by Weisenburger here:

Another form of vengeance, one with results equally disastrous as in the case of blood-vengeance, is suicide. Should a person commit this as vengeance, he places the responsibility for the deed upon those who have caused this action. His relatives would then either force them to pay an indemnity or avenge themselves for the departed life. Further, a person who commits suicide under these circumstances is also actuated by the thought that the dead are capable of bringing about evil and death more effectively than the living. It is evident that suicide committed as a vengeance falls under the same category as murder, calling a blood-feud into being.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 161.

¹⁵⁰ Hendrik Gerhardus Luttig, *The religious system and social organization of the Herero : a study in Bantu culture* (Utrecht: Kemich en Zoon, 1933), p. 107.

This passage contains a tremendous amount of thematic information which the Herero content seems to stem from. We have the concept of suicide linked with the concept of dead spirits maintaining a prolonged threat from the afterlife, and the idea of vengeance against an oppressor, therefore denoting some form of resistance. Perhaps with Luttig's work in mind, we can a slightly difference look at the Herero content in Pynchon's work.

In *Mason & Dixon*, Europe (and the Western mind set in general) find catharsis among the exotic Other. The Quakers have an 'unconceal'd attraction to the Malays and the Black slaves, - their Food, their Appearance, their Music, and so, it must be obvious, their desires to be deliver'd out of oppression.' (*M&D*, p. 61) The European has a predilection towards the outside world as both a cathartic hedonistic playground and an arena for playing out both their desire for their own deliverance. In the Cape, Mason is besieged by the sexuality of the slave girls, and his hosts are keen on setting up the sexual coupling of him and the black slave girls. However, 'tis the Slavery, not any form of Desire, that is of the essence.' (*M&D*, p. 68) The exotic allure of Black Africa is clearly and absolutely about dominion, and the power that Black Africa has over this control is ability to deny it via magical and ritual sacrifice, but in turn still allow such magical actions to remain a supernatural and fearsome performance. Suicide is again mentioned in this section, as a powerful symbol:

But here is a Collective Ghost of that household Scale, - the Wrongs committed Daily against the Slaves, petty and grave ones alike, going unrecorded, charm'd invisible to history, invisible yet possessing Mass, and Velocity, able not only to rattle Chains, but to break them as well. The precariousness to Life here, the need to keep the Ghost propitiated, Day to Day, via the Company's merciless priesthoods and many-volum'd Codes, brings all but the hardiest souls sooner to later to consider the Primary Questions more or less undiluted. Slaves here commit suicide at a frightening Rate,- but so do the Whites, for no reason, or for a Reason

ubiquitous and unaddress'd, which may bear Acquaintance but a Moment at a Time. Mason, as he comes to recognise the sorrowful Nakedness of the Arrangements here, grows morose, whilst Dixon makes a point of treating Slaves with the Courtesy he is never quite able to summon for their Masters. (*M&D*, pp. 68-69)

Mason's moroseness and the Whites movement towards the suicides can be read on a multiple of levels, one being not a reflection of some sort of altruistic and charitable guilt, but instead a fear of such vengeful spirits manifesting. Pynchon is mapping some sort of cosmic karmic balance, with the constant vampiric strain on Black Africa emerging as a counterforce, a slow growth of something resistant that exists in the most threatening and alien aspect of Africa to its colonial oppressors – its irrational, incomprehensible and magical spiritual system.

Dixon has in fact heard, from an assortment of Companions native to the Dutch Indies, Tales of Sorcery, invisible Beings, daily efforts to secure Shelter against Demonic Infestation. "They are not as happy, nor as childlike, as they seem," he tells Mason. "It may content us, as unhappy grown Englishmen, to think that somewhere in the World, Innocence may yet abide,- yet 'tis not among these people. All is struggle,- and all but occasionally in vain." (*M&D* p. 67)

This insight of the African world enlightens us. The Oppressor's mind set (and that of the Quakers) relies on an innocence that can be corrupted and therefore controlled. To know that the innocence is instead something fearful and threatening, therefore acts as a form of resistance that has always existed. Also to admit that the exotic Other is not innocent, but perhaps as threatening, complex and even demonic as the West breaks this traditional colonial fetishism. All this material in Mason & Dixon forms the backdrop for the resistance and revenge that convenes finally in the form of the Zone-Hereros.

However, it is easy to allow this material to fall into a particular groove; that the magic of the marginalised, aboriginal world is a resisting menace to the oppressing

decay of the European superstructure, an irruption of the primordial versus Western modernity, the spiritual Earth against the spiritually detached white European. This particular line of analysis leaves us with an uneasy conclusion. It cannot be the case that Pynchon has scored such a dividing line across race in his political meta-narrative. For it is this assumption that springs from this analysis, and other content across Pynchon begins to filter into this line of questioning. The suggested imaginary status (within the narrative, and along the same lines, out of it as well) of the Schwarzkommando turns them into the mythical black bogeyman of the whites, an invisible but present bugbear that exists underneath the surface of the familiar white European world. This fear can also be considered a conscious one, or at least conscious enough to be manipulated by the white West, as we see in the Herero propaganda films that arguably bring the Schwarzkommando into life. One attempts to frighten the Germans with 'Where are the Hereros tonight? What are they *doing*, this instant, your dark, secret children?' (GR, p. 75)

Whether or not the Malcolm X passage is in turn a spectre of this primordial African *vengeance* is unimportant. Such race games are at least not in the forefront of this thesis, or perhaps even in the intentions of Thomas Pynchon himself. What is important is how this magic from the marginal does in fact suggest a deep-seated European fear of the *Other*, of Africa and other zones of the earth that do not adhere to their ideological tenets. In creating this magic threat that stems from a religious ideology that is at complete odds with the European psyche, Pynchon is in turn commenting on the complex relationships between the West and the Third World.

David Witzling in *Everybody's America: Thomas Pynchon, Race, and the Cultures of Postmodernism* returns to seek new ground on the Herero in Pynchon. He suggests Pynchon is writing them from a constant dual purpose: 'on the one hand, the Zone-

Herero suggest that Pynchon has some sympathy for militancy among people of colour. On the other hand, he represents their situation as one of great vulnerability.¹⁵¹ Witzling shows Pynchon's attitude towards his Zone-Hereros as one that both represents a great sympathy for their situation, but also an inevitable slide into the servitude of the oppressive forces that seek their destruction:

Thus, although the novel suggests that Pynchon was interested in exploring different cultural forms, that interest seems to be subsumed in his belief that modern technology – both weapons and the media - were bound to continue serving an existing hegemony than marginalised groups.”¹⁵²

So it seems that the deification of the western technology via the old practices of the Herero religion is an admirable but fruitless task, according to Witzling. Witzling claims that with every apparent victorious 'attempt to impose their culture on the Western Metropolis'¹⁵³ comes a sense of hopelessness and defeat.

So from this this analysis, we can come to a hypothesis that the Herero (and by extension the marginalised cultures of the texts) are trapped in a number of ways. On the first level they are trapped within the Western culture, apparitions that continue to haunt the world as a reminder of the oppressive actions of a sinful Europe, avatars of a typically European violence. Pynchon's reasoning that the Herero massacre by Von Trotha was a 'blueprint' for the extermination of Europe's Jews further suggests that the Herero are a part of some wider European sin, a ghost that represents the violence that runs as an inherent aspect of Western culture.

Clearly the Herero can find no salvation in this role. They appear broken and Pynchon grants them pathos; they contain none of the threatening Otherness that

¹⁵¹ David Witzling. *Everybody's America : Thomas Pynchon, Race, and the Cultures of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 159.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 159.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 158.

blackness provides elsewhere in the texts, they wear military uniforms in acquiescence to their oppressors, they hold on to the detritus and death symbology of the West to form a new religion. Their act of suicide as vengeance creates nothing more than a transient haunting presence that fades from existence. Even this notion of ritual suicide as vengeance is polluted through a colonial eye, Pynchon is well aware of this irony in his work, and this awareness is apparent in his letter to Thomas F. Hirsch:

The problem as I guess you appreciate, with getting the African side of it, is that the Hereros were preliterate and everything available from them (a) anecdotal and (b) filtered through the literate (McLuhan), Western, Christian biases of European reporters, usually missionaries.¹⁵⁴

Pynchon's acceptance and understanding of the bias in the historical Herero material grants us a boon in the understanding of the mechanics of the marginalised races of his works. The ritualistic practices of the Herero in the novels now shifts its location to the fantasies of the West. The threatening magic of the Herero becomes now a fetishized form of guilt for the West to indulge in as it pleases. The cost of its crimes is now once again determined by the West, on its own terms.

The Letter to T. F. Hirsch is very enlightening on this matter. The importance of the Herero is not in the details of the magic by which they function, or their position as apparitions of colonial brutality, or even the validity of their existence in Pynchon's labyrinthine power structures. While this is all present, the key theme of the Herero material (and the marginalised material in general) is the clash between two opposing cultures. Pynchon states that 'what went on back in the Sudwest is archetypical of every clash between the west and non-west, clashes that are still going on now in South East

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Pynchon, 'Letter to T.F. Hirsch'. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*, by David Seed (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), p. 241.

Asia.¹⁵⁵ The opposing sides of this reoccurring conflict are the analytical and alienating mechanics of the West and the alternate sense of a unified whole that exists elsewhere.

Pynchon writes:

...I feel personally that the number done of the Herero head by the Germans is the same number done on the American Indian head by our own colonists and what is being done on the Buddhist head in Vietnam by the Christianity minority in Saigon and their advisors: the imposition of a culture valuing analysis and differentiation on a culture that valued unity and integration. It is impossible, I think, to consider the Herero apart from his religion, which in turn governed his social organisation.¹⁵⁶

This is the core of the material; the fundamental dichotomies between cultures. As Mondaugen muses in *V*, 'They [the Herero] may have been as civilised as we, I'm not an anthropologist, you can't compare anyway¹⁵⁷ – they were an agricultural, pastoral people.' (*V*, p.255) The act of documenting the Herero done by Luttig and his contemporaries is most definitely problematic for Pynchon, as it represents this analysis and differentiation that so pollutes the cultures that the West comes across. However, by using this material to present a form of Western exoticism forced upon the Herero, we soon begin to feel the Herero material is less about the position of the African in the West, and more about the West's own psyche in the face of its actions. Africa's

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 242.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 241.

¹⁵⁷ There are implications to the notion that there is an inability to 'compare' the Herero culture to the West. Pynchon's stance on the West having an obsession with analysis and control dictates that analysis and comprehension is the 'right' of the West, the mysterious is to be eradicated and the irrational swept away in favour of the rational. Encountering the Herero, the West is faced with a culture with a set of values for life, death and spirituality that defies synergy with a Western culture that has become so invested in both a post-Enlightenment thirst for a secular rationality, and a Calvinist 'divine sanction' that drives the dominance and control of the world. The Herero mind-set cannot be rationalised because there is no common ground, they are a separate entity. Mondaugen muses, perhaps heretically, on this concept claiming perhaps that there is a pluralist world of definitions for 'civilised' that do not engage with Western orthodoxy, a multitudinous world where alternative spiritual systems are just as valid as others. Thus, the Herero communities of the Sudwest are perfect examples of a postsecular community, a pluralist and alternative world with its own derived values and cosmology. It is the sheer presence of this different (and functioning) system that maddens the occupiers. This reactionary violence to the presence of a postsecular multitude forms a sizable part of the discourse between power and the oppressed across Pynchon's corpus.

geography in *V.* takes on the role of an imagined landscape for the mental sojourns of the Western mind. David Seed comments on Africa serving as a 'testing ground' for the eventual mass exterminations in Europe.

The huge spaces, strange light and proximity to the Kalahari ('that vast death') make it a positive threat that dwarfs the human figure. Signs of life are scarce and across this wilderness sounds the mocking cry of the strand wolf, a kind of scavenging hyena. This a landscape where death is constantly present and offers an appropriate context to mass killing.¹⁵⁸

The way the Europeans relate to the African landscape is also important. It is not the land which pollutes the mind of the German occupiers, but instead the clash between their cultural composition and the alien land in which they find themselves. This becomes apparent in the siege part at Foppl's villa in *V.* The chapter begins in typical parody, the League of Nations, representing Western supremacy and ultimate ineffectualism, becomes a profane collection of white European landowners, boarded up against a supposed chaos outside, the scene is reminiscent of the early short story 'Entropy', with a raucous party working as a closed system against the deathly stillness of the Kalahari outside: 'He has uninspiring views of ravines, grass, dry pans, dust, scrub; all repeating, undulating to the eventual wastes of the Kalahari...' (*V.*, p. 235)

David Seed describes the siege party as dreamlike, with its strange structure that Mondaugen wanders through, having strange encounters in succession. Seed is correct, but I would go on to claim that the siege party is a delusional daydream. The barrier between the party and the dead plains of the Kalahari begins to break down as death motifs seep into the party.

¹⁵⁸ David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), p. 94.

The Africa outside becomes something dire and fearsome, the baying of the strand wolf is referred to again and again as some sort of punctuating terror. Seed describes the strand wolf as a mocking scavenger, and Pynchon uses it noticeably as a reference to the supposed terror of the African vacuum outside that threatens entropic collapse on Foppl's villa. Weissmann turns ashen faced and goes into an alcoholic torpor when he hears laughter that he mistakes for the cry of the strand wolf (of note perhaps as his alter-ego in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Blicero, is often depicted as supernaturally lupine), and Mondaugen has a delusion that Godolphin will be devoured by 'hyenas and jackals [that] are padding up and down those little corridors.' (V., p. 260) The Western terror of a threatening, savage Africa is beginning to break the siege, enter the halls of the little enclave of supposed European safety. 'They'll drain his juices, he thought; caress his bones with their paw-pads, gag on his fine white hair.' (V., p. 260) The hyenas that Mondaugen fears become spectres almost, perhaps a ghost of the Bondenswaartz that Mondaugen found savagely beaten by Foppl.

Foppl himself displays a similar terror. He barricades his home against the geography, surrounds himself with white Europeans, creates a fantasy reprise of 1902 and constructs a messianic myth around Von Trotha.

“Your people have defied the Government,” Foppl continued, “they’ve rebelled, they have sinned. General Von Trotha will have to come back to punish you all. He’ll have to bring the soldiers with the beard and the bright eyes, and his artillery that speaks with a loud voice. How you will enjoy it, Andreas. Like Jesus returning to earth, von Trotha is coming to deliver you. Be joyful; sing hymns of thanks. And until then love me as your parent, because I am von Trotha’s arm, and the agent of his will.” (V., p. 240)

Foppl functions as an over the top representation of the colonial spirit at its most cruel and inhuman. He tells Mondaugen of the mental relief (perhaps also

transcendence) of doing away with a moral code, the ease and shamelessness of the art of massacre. Like Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Foppl exudes colonial menace, making the link between sexual domination and colonial prerogative. Seed calls this the merging of colonialism, sado-masochism and notions of submission.¹⁵⁹ Mondaugen on the other hand is disillusioned by the massacre, not taken by the carnage, not fooled by the romanticising. Mondaugen is stalked by death in a different way. David Seed states that:

Throughout this chapter Pynchon makes extensive use of the symbolism of black and white. Blackness, predictably since the dominant perspective is European and Protestant, carries racial and spiritual connotations of damnation, whereas whiteness is associated with disease, bones and death.¹⁶⁰

Mondaugen sees the face of death both home and away. Whiteness haunts him and displays as a harrowing motif of European barbarity. He dreams of home, of the poverty and starvation forced upon Germany by the depression caused by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (which it is said caused Mondaugen to uncharacteristically weep), a world steeped in images of white bone, and an old woman, wraith-like, marking households for death. To Mondaugen, violence and death are omnipresent, at work in every facet of the European culture. When he encounters Andreas, the whipped Herero, white bone 'winking' (V., p. 240) from the wounds shows this inescapable cruelty, the love of death that exists in Europe. In Mondaugen's lullaby to Godolphin, he sings of a 'bloody wraith who looks just like you,' (V., p. 254) a doppelganger that shows some hidden and inherent violence.

¹⁵⁹ Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 97.

Seed refers to Pynchon's depiction of the dehumanised and threatening landscape as making 'racist assumptions in its linkage,'¹⁶¹ and highlighting the separation between the European and the land and people the European occupies that colonialism provides. He explains the way Pynchon depicts proto-concentration camps, the totalitarian brutality and the almost scientifically detached viewings of the massacres from the villa as reflective of this dehumanising effect, drawing together this brutality with the academic distance of the early German anthropologists (Luttig, McLuhan). However, it is reasonable to assume that this chapter has deeper roots, and not only expresses the mechanisms of colonialism but also informs us of how Pynchon constructs Europe and the European psyche.

The animistic magic of the Herero and the supernatural magic of the geography of Africa itself in Pynchon's work belongs firmly alongside how race and marginalisation work within the texts. We can begin to see how the Herero fit into the larger theme of this thesis: the potential of alternative religious systems versus the oppressive, Calvinistic and deathly European (and by extension, American) religion. Pynchon seeks at first in *V* to highlight the Herero as one of a long line of casualties that act as waypoints for Europe's historical progress. In *V* colonialists board themselves up against a fear they themselves transpose upon the landscape, a threat that they brought themselves. The inherent fetish Europe has towards death is brought to Africa, it drives them insane, forces them to repeat old rituals of power, to repeat 1904 again and again as if in communion with their most violent and brutal power structures. Mondaugen notices this madness but cannot place it: 'Perhaps he'd begun to detect the same desperation in Foppl's siege party as there'd been in Munich during the Fasching.' (*V*, p. 250) the starvation of depression-era Munich, the death from which is transferred

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 99.

with them. Again as David Seed noticed, Pynchon is brilliant in depicting the black/white dynamic in the chapter from the colonialist mind-set: black is fearsome and demonic, white is stasis and death.

The threatening magic of the Herero is all paranoid European fantasy. The suicidal vengeance of the Herero does not grant them power, but instead uses them, via Lutting, to perform the role of a frightening bogeyman from Europe's colonial past, an acknowledgement of systems and cosmologies that exist outside of their own narrow view. The tribal suicide is mentioned in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the musings of a Nazi mind:

Something sinister was moving out in the veld: he was beginning to look at their faces, especially those of the women, lined beyond the thorn fences, and he knew beyond logical proof: there was a tribal mind at work out here, and it had chosen to commit suicide... Puzzling. Perhaps we weren't as fair as we might have been, perhaps we did take their cattle and their lands away ... and then the work-camps of course, the barbed wire and the stockades... Perhaps they feel it is a world they no longer want to live in. Typical of them, though, giving up, crawling away to die Why won't they even negotiate? We could work out a solution, some solution... (*GR*, pp. 317-8)

This passage obviously foreshadows the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, but also the utter strangeness of the Herero to the colonial mind and also the paranoid assumption of a supernatural plot by the Herero. They cannot be understood, their supernatural and irreconcilable differences to the Western Christian are ground for extermination. It is a line of reasoning Pynchon often associates with Europe. We've seen it before in the extermination of the Dodo also in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

But ultimately Pynchon is aware of the colonial mind working in his complex relationship with the Herero. Instead of truly owning their magical power, they become empty vessels, true 'empty ones', who now exhausted of their roles as ghosts or demon

apparitions invading the white European's fevered dreams become devoid of identity and true citizens of the Zone.

Primordial Aggression in *Against the Day*

Pynchon's negotiation with the inherent European fear of primordial spaces is indeed – as I have covered – a potentially salvific one. While on one hand it is an exploitative 'othering' of non-European cultures and people, it also grants them an outside power over the master control system. An opposition is created, the rational, singular and secular world at odds with a heterodox, pluralist one. While the master control system uses its own power of assimilation, analysis and death to homogenise and colonise the world, Pynchon shows the Other fighting back from the margins they have been placed in. In *Against the Day*, the marginalised fight back, and the margins themselves become a new form of territory (again, we are reminded of Hume's 'third territory' concept), a animistic zone that exists with viable and sustained resistance against the orthodoxy of the novel, namely Imperialism and Capitalism. Such animistic and magical concerns also bleed into the wider political motifs of the novel, allowing for magic to affect the Anarchist content, providing Pynchon's (now much more focused) political material with a functioning spiritual core.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the animistic content is implicitly passive. Its function is one of transcendence, the escape and dissolution of characters. Slothrop is freed from his election by a loss of identity while Geli Tripping allows Tchitcherine to avoid his fate by becoming invisible to Enzian. The Earth itself seems in deathly decline, with Rocket strike bearing down upon it, and the Cartel exploiting its resources for their Gnostic

concerns. Nature as an animistic force is almost always a passive force, allowing for escapes and limited sanctuary, but rarely does it truly act as a counter to the master control system. But yet there is a point of resistance in the suicide of Zone-Herero. This primal and utterly irrational method of vengeance is built upon in *Against the Day*, as the vengeful spirits of the Herero rise from the Earth and engage in acts of resistance and savagery against the intrusion of modernity.

This more recent negotiation with a violent and aggressive form of animism displays a synergy between spirituality and political activism. Pynchon's use of animism in the novel makes explicit references to living-Earth theories, an ecocritical engagement and the concept of the Earth existing as one holistic entity, and then makes such theories analogous to the more concrete political and historical content. Labour, notably miners, rail workers and the ubiquitous Colorado dynamiters, becomes a thematic backbone for *Against the Day*, with Pynchon exploring the nineteenth-century politics of labour in great detail. While the Anarchists are committing acts of terror against the capitalists, 'those who slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check,' (*AtD*, p. 87) the animistic powers are doing the same.

In a passage where Reef Traverse encounters the Tatzelwurms in a Swiss mine, we see the animistic (in the form of primordial, mythological beasts) running analogous to the Anarchist/socialist violent activism of the novel. The creatures are protective of their subterranean world, and move to savagely defend it as the mine begins to violate the Earth:

“In Europe,” speculated Philippe, “the mountains are much older than in America. Whatever lives in them has had more time to evolve towards a more lethal, perhaps less amiable, sort of creature.”

“It is also a good argument for Hell,” added Gerhardt, “for some primordial plasm of hate and punishment at the center of the Earth which

takes on different forms, the closer it can be projected to the surface. Here under the Alps, it happens to become visible at the Tatzelwurm.” (*AtD*, p. 655)

This notion of a core of 'hate and punishment' within the Earth itself is reminiscent of preterite burial in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The depths of the Earth are where '*the prehistoric wastes submit and are transmuted into the very substance of History...*' (*GR*, p. 639) I explained earlier the importance in Pynchon's texts of an unbroken 'line of transmission' that can be traced back to some pre-lapsarian origin point, and here we encounter this again. But this time, Pynchon is not using 'burial' to express the salvific irruption of an innocence first age, but instead shows it as militant, territorial and deeply dangerous. Christopher Coffman in *Bogomilism, Orphism and Shamanism* states that with this Pynchon is demonstrating 'the immediate relationship between human action and natural reaction.'¹⁶²

The same immediate relationship is happening between the Anarchists and Capitalism. Just as the Tatzelwurms present us with a transition from a pre-lapsarian and innocent animistic past to a violent and vengeance one, so do the preterite of *Against the Day* in turn become much more vital and militant. Just as the avenging spirits of the Earth shed their innocence, Pynchon also divests the preterite of their innocence, as Rev. Moss Gatlin preaches:

“Being born into this don't automatically make you innocent. But when you reach a point in your life where you understand who is fucking who – beg pardon, Lord – who's taking it and who's not, that's when you're obliged to choose how much you'll go along with. If you are not devoting every breath of every day waking and sleeping to destroying those who slaughter the innocent as easily as signing a check, then how innocent are you willing to call yourself?” (*AtD*, p. 87)

¹⁶² Coffman, 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism', p. 97.

Like the Tatzelwurms, the preterite are ‘given teeth’, and Pynchon begins to establish an ethical system of resistance against the intrusion of Capitalism. The innocence of the creatures is no longer dependent on the master’s immorality. Innocence is no longer an ethical concern for Pynchon, and instead the preterite are given a more sustainable and functioning set of ethical tools: compassion and activity. We will address this new ethical topography later in this thesis.

The Tatzelwurms themselves, acting as they are in reaction to building a train line (the train line being the most evocative symbol of Victorian capitalist progress), are akin to the loom smashers and other saboteurs that are synonymous with anarchist action, and thus the boundary between Anarchist outlaw and animistic spirit blurs:

“Once you had the encounter [with the Tatzelwurm],” Gerhardt agreed, “it is with you forever. This is why I believe they are sent to us, to some of us in particular, for a purpose.”

“What’s that?” Reef said.

“To tell us that we shouldn’t be doing this.”

“Tunnelling?”

“Putting railroads.”

“But we’re not,” Reef pointed out. “The people who are paying us are. Do *they* ever see the Tatzelwurm?”

“It visits them in their dreams.”

“And it looks like us,” added Flaco. (*AtD*, p. 656)

From this we can claim that the vengeful spirits of the marginalised global ‘other’ that we saw take shape with the Herero suicide have become a fully-formed aspect of the spiritual discourse in *Against the Day*. The anarchism material and the animist material tend to work alongside each other, with the animism supplying the anarchists an eco-critical stance, and allowing resistant action to be considered, as Coffman

claims, '[to be] promoting a change of view that will open up new possibilities of spiritual and biological survival.'¹⁶³

Animism itself contains violence and resistance, as we can see from the psychoanalytical anthropology done on the subject by Edward Taylor and Geza Roheim. While I will not claim that Roheim's *Animism, Magic and the Divine King* is a primary source for Pynchon's work, Wiesenburger has already proved that Pynchon is familiar with fin de siècle anthropology with his work on Luttig. On animism, Roheim states:

Animism characterises tribes very low in the scale of humanity and thence ascends, deeply modified in its transmission, but from first to last preserving an unbroken continuity, in the midst of high, modern culture [...] Animism is, in fact, the ground of Religion, from that of savages, up to civilised men.¹⁶⁴

Taylor and Roheim are both think that animism represents both the first examples of a spiritual development in humans, and also a still detectable 'baseline' that is present in modern day 'civilised' religious expression, something he and Taylor both call 'our mental past'. This concept of a collective memory of a primordial spirituality is (as we have already seen) a consistent and important trope in Pynchon's work regarding a theological resistance. Transmission of a shared past is an important component of how the holistic, communal approach to resistance that Pynchon adopts works. While the master control system seeks to divide, isolate and compartmentalise the world, a sense of connectivity and unification with a primordial centre is a key resistant quality against such aggression. Tradition, memory and evocation of such magical possibilities allow for Pynchon to assert animism as firm opposition to Western orthodoxy, challenging its

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 112.

¹⁶⁴ Geza Roheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King* (London: K. Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1930), p. v.

notions of linear time, a post-Enlightenment sense of capital-P ‘Progress’, and of course its obsession with Death. Indeed, ‘it is not often Death is told so clearly to fuck off – the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations.’ (*GR*, p. 10)

We can then consider there being a conflict between two particular kinds of history: the secular, one-way history of the master control system that excludes the preterite (‘secular history is a diversionary tactic’ (*GR*, p. 167)) and the eco-critical view of history as the collective – and much more inclusive – memory of the Earth itself. The former is repeatedly treated by Pynchon as the antagonistic viewpoint, whereas the latter allows for Pynchon to develop a more ethical and collective way of looking at history as a fluid connectivity to a pre-lapsarian past.

While *Gravity’s Rainbow* explores a world where such an eco-critical way of thinking about history has become marginalised by Western modes of thinking, *Against the Day* takes place in a time when such a dichotomy is still in conflict, and animistic ideas are allowed to physically manifest in aggressive, resistant forms. Once again, we can refer to Roheim, who posits that animistic magic has an aggressive and militant component within it. When exploring the function of animistic magic, Roheim claims that magic was originally ‘mankind [on] the offensive against the world.’¹⁶⁵ This is a common theme among anthropologists of the age, where sorcery is a tool for protection against antagonistic spirits that exist outside of the practitioners immediate community. Such spirits caused sickness and other physical ailments, and always were perceived as an invader ‘Other’. The greatest fear, according to Roheim, was not death but castration and amputation – the former representing the destruction of sexuality and the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. v.

dominance of its thematic opposite, death. The latter represented disarmament, a sense of impotency in face of an aggressive and violent exterior world.

Roheim's notion of mankind 'on the offensive' suggests that animism exists to counter the negative effect of a strange and alien 'other' who wish to do harm or encroach upon the territory of man. In *Against the Day* this dynamic is reversed, where it is men who are violating the communal spaces of the 'other'. The magic of animism becomes the magic of the preterite, a spirituality used to ward off a Gnostic master control system that seeks to encroach upon animistic notions of unity and communality, and disarm the people. As we know from Major Marvy's fate in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the master control system is no stranger to a little castration.

It is the Vormance expedition in *Against the Day* that most spectacularly demonstrates animistic aggression. In this section we see Fleetwood Vibe venturing to the polar regions with the Chums of Chance to uncover a meteorite, in a plot that channels both H.P. Lovecraft and Mary Shelley. The northern regions function as the clearest 'animistic territory' in the novel, a place abundant with life, both natural and spirit:

Nunatak, in the Eskimo tongue literally "land connected", refers to a mountain peak tall enough to rise above the wastes of ice and snow that otherwise cover the terrain. Each, believed to have its own guardian spirit, is alive, an ark sheltering whatever lichens, mosses, flowers, insects, or even birds may be borne to it by the winds of the Region. During the last Ice Age, many of our mountains in the U.S., familiar and even famous now, were *nunataks* then, rising in the same way above an ancient frozen expanse, keeping the flames of species aglow till such time as the ice should recede and life resumes its dominion. (*AtD*, p. 140)

The Nunatak mountain displays the dominance of nature in the arctic as opposed to its marginalisation in the 'civilised' parts of the world. As Coffman states, 'nature, here,

has intention and voice; the landscape is alive. What it consciously pursues, however, is unclear.¹⁶⁶ The journey past Nunatak deviates between familiar pre-lapsarian pastoral images of an imminent green Earth and a much more foreboding stance. The knowledge that the mountains of America, right in the heartland of civilisation, were once containers of ancient life could be construed a *threat*, a group of sleeper cells hidden within the very stone of the nation, containing some form of violent insurgency. Once again we see how the more overtly animist content of the novel references back to concepts of political violence and resistance. It is also worth noticing that the north itself is spatially aligned with death in *Gravity's Rainbow* via Herero cosmology.

After Nunatak, the expedition heads to an unnamed glacier said to be near the Ginnungagap, a void that existed before creation in Norse mythology, that Pynchon ascribes a human mouth to, 'a wide-open human mouth, mortal, crying, screaming, calling out, calling back.' (*AtD* p. 128) Here we find two occurrences. The first is Pynchon adopting yet another animist system (arguably); that of Nordic mythology. Spirituality is assimilated into Pynchon's grand animist schema, in a move that Coffman calls the ability to 'understand the many discursive worlds of Thomas Pynchon without demanding that anyone be regarded as structurally dominant.'¹⁶⁷ However, this mass of spiritual concerns does now have a voice in *Against the Day*, and so no longer exists as a disparate Serresian 'background noise', and instead are brought together into a coherent ethical structure. Katherine Hume in 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*' agrees that Pynchon's heterodox margins take a coherent form in the novel: 'In his other novels, multitudinous voices present their views, and identifying any one as Pynchon's would be difficult to justify. In this novel, though, so many voices

¹⁶⁶ Coffman, 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism', p. 93.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 92.

offer us bits of the same overall stance that something relatively coherent emerges.¹⁶⁸ The Ginnungagap is less of a distant and hidden 'Holy Center', and instead a viable and somewhat dangerous 'scare', that has a distinct and present vocal power. The 'mouth' of the Ginnungagap appears to be both ageless and transtemporal, but also human, mortal and full of fury, once again presenting us both with a mythic image and also a kinship between the more immediately human concerns of anarchism and ecological resistance. The mouth also acts as a *collective* mouthpiece for the buried preterite, whose plight in the novel transcends time, as the Ginnungagap is in itself spans all history, 'to our own end and beginning.'¹⁶⁹

The notion of the Earth as an animistic entity in itself being in in alliance (or at least in ethical alignment) with the Anarchist's struggle against the onset of Capitalism is continued further into the Vormance Expedition. Fleetwood Vibe and his expeditionary force do not embark on an intrepid journey to the north for spiritual commune, but on a profitable endeavour. As Coffman writes, 'the "explorers" are really exploiters, groups whose "interest" is that of both curiosity and finance.'¹⁷⁰ Upon the discovery of the 'meteorite' they uncover a gigantic creature from the ice, its features described as 'serpent like' (*AtD*, p. 141) – a gesture towards the Edenic serpent and the introduction of original sin, perhaps – and proceed to unearth it, with business-like precision. They are explicitly mindless of what the being is; there is 'not a dreamer in the lot of us, to be honest, much less the dreamers of nightmares.' (*AtD*, pp. 141-2)

The exhumation of the creature suggests a perverse and profane enactment of a mythic creation story, where the industrious expedition free the creature from the ice as if they were the cow 'Andumla' licking the world into being, as in Norse mythology:

¹⁶⁸ Kathryn Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision', p. 168.

¹⁶⁹ Coffman, 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism', p. 94.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 96.

'Which of us then, mindlessly as children at a fairground, had not performed the analogous service for our own frozen visitant? What gods, what races, what worlds were about to be born?' (*AtD*, p. 142) Fleetwood's 'mindless' act of creation is indeed sacrilegious; a profane 'meddling' with animist power for a naïve and antithetical desire for financial gain, a Capitalist-born goal that the Earth itself is rallying against throughout the rest of the novel. Naturally, such a blasphemous act results in violent aggression as the creature, once transported back, proceeds to destroy an unnamed port town.

While the current critical opinion of the creature's destruction of the town is that of a 9/11 analogy, there are other concerns at work in this passage. The story of the creature itself is reminiscent of Pynchonian favourites such as *Godzilla*, or *King Kong*; in which a fantastical beast is torn (or awoken) from primordial space into the modern, usually a result of capitalist hubris, be it the adventurism of *King Kong*, or the nuclear testing of *Godzilla*. As well as making an acerbic political stance on a specific event, Pynchon also provides us with a wider ethical message: one should not labour for profit or personal ego, but should forgo such things for a greater – or at least in a communal sense – good. Coffman also identifies this moral thread, in regard to his exploration of Orphism and Shamanism:

The Orphic and Shamanistic ability to communicate with an even direct natural forces is exactly what the members of the Vormance Expedition, the operators of *Against the Day*'s corrupt mines, and the novel's other capitalist entrepreneurs and militants lack, a lack that leads, ultimately, to the awakening of the destructive mechanisms of the earth's revenge.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹Ibid, p. 107.

Amy Elias in 'Plots, Pilgrimage, and the Politics of Genre in *Against the Day*' also comments on this moral, claiming that a particular ethical clarity exists in the novel:

Contrary to living a life of individual self-determination, however, Pynchon's characters, as wandering pilgrims, must learn submissions and the importance of communal bonds. Characters are lost when they pursue the ends of their pilgrimage egotistically.¹⁷²

Fleetwood's own ego-driven pilgrimage is indeed a corrupted one, and is punished via in the most brutal terms. Submission of a kind is learnt by the townsfolk, but far too late and out of terror, and is barely understood: '...in hopes of being spared for further suffering, as demonstrations of loyalty to the Destroyer, in the spirit of the votive shrine, the had put up a number of proprietary structures.' (*AtD*, p. 154) the frightened citizens attempt a futile capitulation with the aggressive, animist force that is assailing them, but they adopt the same half-hearted media they used to ward it off. A shrine 'not exactly of Christ' (*AtD*, p. 153) is erected, but it is mutable in appearance enough to accommodate 'whatever turnings of heart that becomes necessary in striking a deal with the invader.'

This 'submission' that Elias mentions is meant to be a submission towards a cooperation with a larger spiritual awareness, rather than the fearful, short-term surrender that we see the city folk engaging in. Hume also frames submission as a more positive connection with a more embracing spiritualism, in this case in the context of Cyprian's journey into the Bogomil convent:

His [Cyprian's] sexual submissiveness, however, proves a prelude to his total submission to the divine, an interesting change for Pynchon, who in *Gravity's Rainbow* suggested that sadomasochism was inherent in the state's relation to its subjects and key to totalitarian power. Submission in that

¹⁷² Amy Elias, 'Plots, Pilgrimage, and the Politics of Genre in *Against the Day*', in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (ed.), *Pynchon's Against the Day: a Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 36.

paradigm encourages citizens to obey their leaders slavishly, no matter how viscous the orders. In *Against the Day*, by contrast, total submission leads Cyprian to a *luminous clarity of mind*. (*AtD*, p. 180 emphasis added)

Here we encounter a dichotomy between Pynchon's tendency to depict a unified utopia, and the newer move towards a violent (and perhaps 'righteous') oppositional stance between the master control system and animist forces. Pynchon does indeed vocalise this problem by providing us with two potential possibilities to Fleetwood's 'heretical' awakening of the creature: one of mutual understanding with what befell them, and another more pessimistic (and more likely) move towards spite and division between these two conflicting paradigms.

Out of that night and day of unconditional wrath, folks would've expected to see any city, if it survived, all newly reborn, purified by flame, taken clear beyond greed, real-estate speculating, local politics – instead of which, here was this weeping widow, some one-woman grievance committee in black, who would go on to save up and lovingly record and mercilessly begrudge every goddamn single tear she ever had to cry, and over the years to come would make up for all of them by developing into the meanest, cruellest bitch of a city, even among cities not notable for their kindness. (*AtD*, pp. 153-4)

This 'forking path' moment is a clear comment on the deepening opposition between Western and Middle Eastern ideologies in the post-9/11 world and the changes in the American national psyche this caused. We can extrapolate other wider concerns parallel to this, namely the politics of Capitalism and an alternative ecological system. Nature's counter-attack on the civilised world (again, also mirrored by the counter-attacks undertaken by the Anarchists) does not engender a communal consideration of eco-critical positions ('a city made new'), but instead a collective hurt ego, and a further excuse for the increasing imposition of humanity upon nature. As we know from *Gravity's Rainbow*, Capitalism and Imperialism (and all the various apparatus that come

together to form the master control system) are personified by their masculine identity, and any cooperation with ecological alternative paths simply reinforces the narrative of victimhood, the 'bitch in men's clothing.' (*AtD*, p. 154) The increasingly violent characterisation of an animist Earth, shown through this 9/11 critique, ironically increases Capitalism's protestant sanction that the Earth exists a consumable commodity. The more the Earth protests, the more it places itself in this particular narrative. The master control system cannot accept its 'all-night rape' (*AtD*, p. 154) but perversely deems its own exploitation of the natural world a theological right. A 'war' is the only solution to the opposition between capitalist orthodoxy and ecological heterodoxy, due simply to the ego of the former. In *Against the Day*, Pynchon implies that violence is the only response, and thus the Earth itself becomes a paragon of a vengeance first hinted at in the suicide of the Hereros. As Hume writes, 'Pynchon seems more politically aggressive here than in earlier novels, if only out of despair over a lack of effective peaceful alternatives.'¹⁷³

In a novel in which the power-games of Imperialism are so integral, the concept of territory is an important one. It is only apt that the animist forces are provided with their own territory. No longer in the margins, animism has dominion over specific parts of the world, places that have not yet succumbed to 'secular geography.' As Hume writes, 'Pynchon makes us notice the importance of the spiritual by making it physical.'¹⁷⁴ There is a plethora of 'magical' spaces in the novel. Some such as Shambhala are mythic cities in the spirit of Vheissu in *V.*, others like the Bogomil convent are nodes of transcendence or simple sanctuary. Others are 'doubles' of existing places, such as the Venice of the Arctic, where the shaman Penhallow observes the ice-flow briefly

¹⁷³ Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision', p. 168.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 177.

adopting the 'same shape as those of secular Venice and its own outlying islands.' (*AtD*, p. 136) Others appear more like warzones, wastelands that are the result of 'the planet's attempt to defend itself.'¹⁷⁵ The most interesting of these magical 'counter-territories' is the *underground*.

The exterior of the Earth has always been the thematic 'home' of the preterite, from the moment in *Gravity's Rainbow* where the preterite masses of London descend into the ruins, and over time Pynchon has shifted in his portrayal of this space. Prior to *Against the Day*, burial was analogous to a Calvinist 'passing over' of the preterite, a forgotten space that functions as a forgotten space that is awaiting some distant, chiliastic revival. In *Against the Day*, that chiliastic return is more realised, and functions through the particularly violent and aggressive magical animism we see mentioned by Roheim and Taylor. The Earth itself is framed as a second world – a preterite world if you will – a subterranean territory that is 'a collection of hot springs, caves, fissures, passageways, one hiding-place within another...'(*AtD*, p. 658)

If in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the earth beneath acts as a vault, holding the repressed until they can enact some chiliastic return, the beings of the underworld in *Against the Day* seem to be devoid of any of this, instead expressing a hate for the surface dwellers. There are many reasons that could be ascribed to this, such as Pynchon's fin de siècle pastiche and allusions to H.G. Wells. The disenfranchised that become buried in the earlier part of the corpus are now transformed into Morlocks, both the Tatzelwurms and the aggressive gnome like inhabitants of the 'hollow Earth' that the Chums of Chance sojourn to.

We have encountered 'gnomes' before in Pynchon's work. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the mittelwerks where Slothrop enacts his Tannhäuser persona, absent gnomes are said

¹⁷⁵ Coffman, 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamansim', p. 112.

to have worked on the rockets. In *Against the Day*, the Chums of Chance descend into the Hollow Earth, and encounter a civilisation of fierce gnomes. Pynchon alludes to such travels within the planet as once being easy, a fantastical sojourn beneath the Earth to strange and adventurous lands. There is talk of border settlements, 'which in former times had been the sites of yearly markets, as dwellers in the interior came out to trade luminous fish, giant crystals with geomantic properties, unrefined ores of various useful metals, and mushrooms unknown to the fungologists of the surface world...' (*AtD* pp. 128-9), and which are now under siege by hostile armies of gnomes, who are swarming over these outposts. It seems portentous that these gnomes (I would argue the same gnomes) are then drafted to build the Nazi weapons in *Gravity's Rainbow*. This Hollow Earth passage - while also revelling in the fantasy that surrounds the Chums of Chance sequences - allows us to notice this transition of the Earth as a benevolent salvific entity that we have seen prior to the post nineties novels towards something resistant and malign. Even the polar portals that allow this passage begin to close, the fantastical closing its borders and declaring hostility to an increasingly secular surface world, with its animist gods now petrified to rock:

...the desert floor was populated by pillars of rock, worn over centuries by the unrelenting winds to a kind of post-godhead, as if once long ago having possessed limbs that they could move, heads they could tilt and swivel to watch you ride past, faces so sensitive they reacted to each change of weather, each act of predation around them, however small, these once-watchful beings, now past face, past gesture, standing refined at last to simple vertical attendance. (*AtD*, p. 209)

The encroaching world of capitalism and industrial growth is to blame for the current static nature of these 'old gods', where the animistic entities of areas that have come under the dominance of mankind have been stricken still and dumb, while the

natural life of spaces not yet 'conquered' (such as the polar regions of the Iceland Spar section) are still abundant with life. More specifically, the pillars themselves are used by the demonic town of Jeshimon as punitive burial sites for criminals, and Webb Traverse, the anarchist patriarch of the Traverse family, is left upon one after being executed for his outlawry. While Pynchon states that these pillars were once the gods of a chaotic, primordial world (the 'green uprising' mentioned in *Gravity's Rainbow*), they are now perversely mirrored as a zone of death and religious punishment, in the form of Zoroastrian 'Towers of Silence', 'no stairs or ladders, high and steep-sided enough to discourage mourners from climbing, no matter how athletic or bent on honouring the dead – living humans had no place on top.' (*AtD*, pp. 209-10)

The towers of silence in Jeshimon represent a complex problem regarding human authority and the appropriation of the natural world. Webb's body is hung upside down from one, in a reference to the Hanged Man tarot card, the card of the fool. He could be considered in communion with nature, being in a place where no living human could be. This restriction of access resonates back to the aggressive territorialism of the Tatzelwurms and the gnomes of the Hollow Earth, a place of nature that no human can co-opt and invade. A perfect grave perhaps for a preterite outlaw like Webb, the reversal of the Hanged Man card after all can represent outlaws and martyrs. Yet this passage is not the transcendent end of Webb as Reef comes to rescue him, and only after his removal from the tower can Webb's body speak its final goodbyes and pleas for revenge. Indeed, Reef's climb to the top of the pillar is supplied with a holy soundtrack, 'like notes on an organ.' (*AtD*, p. 213)

The Zoroastrian overtones of this passage go far to rob the sky burial of Webb of any animist liberation. In Zoroastrian doctrine, bodies are forbidden to be interred into the ground for fear of contaminating 'the sacred elements of earth, fire and water by

decomposing the bodies of believers into the Ahura Mazda.¹⁷⁶ Webb's body is thus separated from the Earth. This can be taken as a blasphemy towards the preterite spirituality of Pynchon's work, the denial of the communion with the Earth that forms much of the preterite connection to burial and a transcendent 'merging' with ecology. Webb, unlike Slothrop, is not allowed to return to a primordial union with nature. The authoritative punishment of Jeshimon's sky burials also departs from any link to nature, as many of the towers of silence are constructed from telephone poles, images of technological capitalism and industrialisation. Jeshimon itself, governed by a man who has 'the horns of the devil, and [they] signify that Elderly Gent and his work' (*AtD*, p. 212), thus presents us with a preterite 'Hell', a place of death that punishes preterite outlaws and champions. Indeed, Reef's extraction of his father mirrors Orpheus' rescue of Eurydice, and once liberated from Jeshimon, Webb is shepherded into the afterlife by the Chums of Chance, 'agents of a kind of *extrahuman justice*.' (*AtD*, p. 215) Jeshimon is indeed the place where the monolithic and oppressive power structures send bad preterite after they die.

Webb's burial and subsequent rescue from Hell reflects a larger discourse between human power and nature. A burial, often connected in Pynchon's work to a communion with a subterranean and primordial force, becomes instead a draconian punishment for those who practice anarchism and ally themselves with the chaotic natural forces. Like the coal-tars of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the natural becomes co-opted, subsumed and transformed into death by the master control system. However, there are always slim possibilities of resistance and escape for the preterite, as Reef finds in the 'silent market' of resistance against the totalitarian judiciary of authority, that provides ropes

¹⁷⁶ Dietrich Huff, 'Archeological Evidence of Zoroastrian Funerary Practices', in Michael Stausberg (ed.), *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context* (Lieden: Brill, 2004), p. 593.

for those 'unwilling to leave matters to the mercies of Jeshimon.' (*AtD*, p. 213) Such ropes, representing salvific possibilities amidst oppression, are plentiful in *Against the Day*, as I will now move to discuss.

The Possibilities of a Heterodox Technology

While the spiritual dichotomy in *Gravity's Rainbow* is between the scientism of technocracy and the marginalised preterite of the world and their multitudinous spiritualities, *Against the Day* sees a mediation between technology and magic, where the multitudinous and irrational tropes that I have given magic synergize with technology. *Against the Day* is situated on one of the familiar 'forks in the road', where the division between these two concepts was yet to be created. As a result, we see Pynchon looking at technology through a lens of Victorian optimism, invoking alternative technological potential such as the works of Nikola Tesla, Wellsian 'steam-punk' science fiction machines and – perhaps the most interesting in the context of this thesis – tracing an unbroken line from primordial magic through to modern day mathematics.

Quaternion mathematics forms a large part of *Against the Day*. Like Freemasonry in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the quaternions express their 'art' as having primordial roots, citing it was a magical process: 'Our magic is more ancient'. At this point I will not be attempting to analyse the quaternion material in much detail, as this can be found in Simon de Bourcier's *Pynchon and Relativity: Narrative Time in Thomas Pynchon's Later Novels*, but it is enough to note that in this later novel Pynchon is allowing space

for the scientific and the magical world to co-exist, a concept that seemed to be anathema in his prior works. In fact, technological magic appears to be taken very seriously by Pynchon in *Against the Day*, as he allows for the Victorian optimistic mode of the text to incorporate a multiple of irrational and rational technological functions, rather than the closed-off systems in the post-war setting of *Gravity's Rainbow*. To situate these two approaches, one can call the technology of the former novel 'orthodox technology' and the latter 'heterodox technology'. An early reference to nostalgia for heterodox technology can indeed be found in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in a passage that almost predicts the content of the later novel:

...through the violence, to a numbered cosmos, a quaint brownwood-panelled, Victorian kind of Brain War, as between quaternions and vector analysis in the 1880s – the nostalgia of Aether, the silver, pendulumed, stone-anchored, knurled-brass, filigreed elegantly functional shapes of your grandfathers. (*GR*, p. 726)

It is exciting to imagine Pynchon using this simple passage as a springboard into the deep exploration of Victorian science in *Against the Day*. It is perhaps more useful, however, to see that Pynchon was considering this dividing line between technological heterodoxy and orthodoxy, and how it affects the dichotomy between the modern age and the magical age. Post-*Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon becomes less critical of science and technology, allowing it to be incorporated into the spiritual matrix of his novels. *Against the Day* allowed technology to be considered in the same way as he did with magic and spirituality earlier; an entity than can be placed into ethical, communal and postsecular forms of spiritual life as Kathryn Hume posits:

He [Pynchon] knows we live in a technological world. While he wishes us to diminish our reliance on technology, he does not expect us to wait for that to happen before we may seek the transcendent world. We must quest

within the world we have inherited – hence, the apparent contradiction of some characters finding their breakthrough by means of math or technology and the new acceptability of cities to Pynchon as places for valid community living.¹⁷⁷

Hume's statement here shows a shift in Pynchon's approach to technology, from the technological systems of death and destruction that make up much of the Calvinist and Gnostic content of *Gravity's Rainbow* toward a synthesising of preterite communities with technology, allowing it to become a viable part of the postsecular. Indeed, Pynchon comes to consider the space where the technological is new and fresh as having salvific possibilities before it becomes the apparatus of the master control system, a 'technological nostalgia', if you will. This is vocalised in his introduction to Jim Dodge's novel *Stone Junction*, where he writes:

Stone Junction was first published in 1989, towards the end of an era still innocent, in its way, of the cyberworld just ahead about to exponentially explode upon it. To be sure, there were plenty of computers around then, but they were not so connected together as they were shortly to become. Data available these days was accessible then only to the Authorized, who didn't always know what they had or what to do with it [...] The web was primitive country, inhabited only by a few rugged pioneers, half loco and wise to the smallest details of their terrain. Honour prevailed, laws were unwritten, outlaws, as yet undefinable, were few. The question had only begun to arise of how to avoid, or preferably, escape altogether, the threat, indeed promise, of control without mercy that lay in wait down the comely vistas of freedom that computer-folk were imagining then – a question we are still asking. Where can you jump in the rig and head for any more – who's out there to grant us asylum?¹⁷⁸

Pynchon here gives the technological 'frontier' romanticism, casting the first users of communication technology in the role of preterite outlaws, acting as postsecular communities with their own ethics but free of law and control. Like the Zone, these

¹⁷⁷ Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision', p. 183.

¹⁷⁸ Pynchon, 'Introduction to *Stone Junction*', p. x -xi.

almost mythic starting points hold their salvific properties only for a brief time, with a plethora of functions, options and possibilities, before they consolidate into one singular entity, usually at the behest of the master control system.

In *Against the Day*, such technological pluralism exists, mostly due to Pynchon's reassessment of its place in the postsecular spaces, but partially due to the historical setting of the book, and Pynchon's own romanticised view of Victorian science being a very frontier and fresh entity. In its original emergent form, science had not been yet subsumed into the Capitalist engine, and still had a multitudinous anarchy to it. This romantic view of a 'heterodox technology' draws from period literature and historical figures of the time: Nickolai Tesla features as a techno-magician who posits a communal and anti-capitalist system, the Chums of Chance's airship fosters some of the fin-de-siècle optimism surrounding air travel of the age, and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* makes an appearance through the scientist Professor Vanderjuice, whose temporal antics recall Eddin's resistant notions of 'a blessed inertia, a drag against the one-way time of the Gnostics.'¹⁷⁹ The sheer breadth of *Against the Day*'s technological engagement is vast, and a subject that has been keenly studied by critics - Reilly, Dalsgaard and de Bourcier chief among them - and my aim is not to document how radically different Pynchon's stance on technology is in the novel. Instead, in the last section of this chapter I will explore how technology supports the spaces of preterite technology that I have already staked out, and fits in to a wider resistant concept of 'magic', a term that not only encompasses not just his animistic concerns, but stands as key to Pynchon's postsecular framework.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's nostalgic voice laments over the 'fork in the road not taken', and this splitting of worlds – the dystopian one always trodden, the utopian

¹⁷⁹ Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, p. 151.

lost in time – is expanded upon in *Against the Day*. The world of the novel is bifurcated itself. Firstly I have already shown the oppositional relationship between the ordered, secular world of Capitalism and the chaotic, ecological animistic world, and this dual-world mentality informs many of the novel's themes. Iceland spar, the mineral that splits light into two via a process called 'double refraction' (demonstrated in the astute cover art for the first edition hardback) provides us with a visual metaphor for this. The double refraction of Iceland spar is used to posit the idea of a pluralism of worlds, of parallel ideas and spaces that undermine the authoritative centre of the master control system. Looking through it shows 'not just the man but his ghost alongside him', a vision of a multitude of worlds that is 'either horrifying or amazing.' (*AtD*, p. 375) Even the 'book of Iceland spar', found by the Vormance Expedition, holds magical properties; a holy book that transcends secular time and sees '*days not yet transpired.*' (*AtD*, p. 133)

These overarching themes of bifurcation and the 'splitting of paths' sometimes almost become literal at points. The *Stupendica*, the ship that is to take Dally Rideout and Kit Traverse to Europe, literally splits into two vessels, one that takes Dally to a magical and fantastic counter-Venice, and the other that transforms into a warship¹⁸⁰, prophetically heading towards the world war to come:

All hell likewise had broken loose topside. As if syntonic wireless messages, travelling through the Aether, might be subject to influences we remain at

¹⁸⁰ Ships have been used before for transcendent journeys. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, military and civilians alike, "its screaming fascist cargo," (*GR*, p. 491) board the *Anubis*, named after the Egyptian god of death. It is portrayed as a vessel of death, painted stark white and "driving northward" (*GR*, p. 489) into the kingdom of death. While the *Emperor Maximillian* represents a ship heading towards the real, the secular militarisation of Europe, the *Stupendica* becomes a spectral vessel, much like the ghost-like *Anubis*. Like "the white *Anubis*, gone on to salvation," (*GR*, p. 667) the *Stupendica*'s destination is a refuge, ghostly versions of Venice and Trieste that allow, for a moment, Dally Rideout's safety against the apocalyptic fatalism that Kit's half of the bilocated ship represents. Thus the *Stupendica* appears more salvific, more of a postsecular space that exists both briefly and in resistance to the secular warmongering of the opposing path that Kit finds himself on. The *Anubis* does not have such a quality, it ferries its passengers towards a static and ascetic 'death-kingdom', and there is no preterite redemption to be found on board, as "they throw everything of value over the side." (*GR*, p. 667)

present ignorant of, or perhaps, owing to the unnaturally shaky quality of present-day “reality,” the receivers in the ship’s Marconi room were picking up traffic from somewhere else not quite “in” the world, more like from a continuum lateral to it... around midafternoon the Stupendica had received a message in cipher, to the effect that British and German battle groups were engaged off the Moroccan coast, and that a state of general European war should be presumed in effect. (*AtD* , pp. 517-8)

The ship itself splits in two, and sailors comically tear off their uniforms to reveal the get-up of naval ratings. The ship, for a moment maintains a dual identity, one briefly transposed over the other before they split. As the chief Oberhaupttheitzer says:

“...there are no staterooms, it is no longer the Stupendica up there. That admirable vessel has sailed on to its destiny. Above decks now you will only find His Majesty’s dreadnought, *Emperor Maximilian*. It is true that for a while the two ships did share a common engine room. A ‘deeper level’ where dualities are resolved.” (*AtD*, p. 519)

The Stupendica represents a secondary, alternative magic world. It acts as a vessel that can travel to these non-secular locations, locations in Pynchon’s imagined universe where physical journeys and spiritual journeys operate in tandem. Dally, who stays aboard the Stupendica, undergoes a strange transcendent experience after the split, while Kit, trapped on the militaristic Emperor Maximilian, is brought into the war-torn world of a modern Europe.

As if she had exited her life briefly and been given the ability to travel on a parallel course, ‘close’ enough to watch herself doing it, Dally discovered an alternative way to travel by land, port to port, faster than the ship was moving... she sped, it seemed slightly above ground level, through the fragrant late summer twilight, parallel to the course of the ship.... Perhaps, now and then, over a break in the dunes and scrub and low concrete walls, catching a glimpse of the Stupendica, under way, passing along the eternal coast, dogged and slow, all details, folds, and projections muted gray as a fly’s body seen through its wings... as night came falling and the ship, outraced, crept on behind... she would return to her deck chair out of breath, sweating, exhilarated for no reason, as if she had just escaped some organised threat to her safety. (*AtD*, p. 524)

Dally's out of body experience clearly grants the split from the secular history of Europe that the *Stupendica* undertakes a transcendent quality. As Oberhauptheizer claimed, it has sailed on its destiny, a transcendent location outside of known history, and into some eternal parallel existence. The simile with the fly offers the ship some unity with the landscape, and in turn the whole landscape a singular togetherness in opposition to the conflict and chaos of the Great War that overshadow the entire novel. In turn, her new location outside of the secular world offers Kit a goal, a path for his own redemption and salvation. As Hume writes, 'Having plighted his troth, he unconsciously intuits that his salvation must be worked out with her and will not be available if he truly abandons her.'¹⁸¹ Kit is thus granted a quest narrative, and must navigate the plurality of worlds in order to be reunited with his lover. The destination of the *Stupendica* is also worth mentioning at this point. The ship, bearing Dally, docks at Venice, in some theatrical fog masking it and allowing 'for some brief ghostly transaction' (*AtD*, p. 524). Venice takes the form of some ghostly city occupied by ascetics guided by single lanterns, and Dally questions its validity. The *Stupendica* finally makes landfall at Trieste, but again Dally is unconvinced as to its identity as Trieste. Instead, we are given one of many potential copies of the city within a possible plurality of worlds.

Many of the locations in *Against the Day* have these doubled identities, having one or more magical possibilities that act in opposition against their secular counterparts. Particular cities, usually considered to be particular secular and modernist spaces, are treated with these multiple copies. Justin St.Clair in 'Binocular Disparity and Pynchon's Panoramic Paradigm' sees this as part of Pynchon's 'panoramic' method in *Against the*

¹⁸¹ Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision', p. 175.

Day, stating that secular locations 'seem to double back and reduplicate,'¹⁸² providing these multitudinous worlds. As an unusually wise parrot says to Frank in *Against the Day*:

Think! Double refraction! Your favourite optical property! Silver mines, full of *espato* double-refracting all the time, and not only light rays, naw, uh-uh! Cities too! People! Parrots! You just keep floating around in the gringo smoke cloud thinking there's only one of everything, *heuvón*, you don't see those strange lights all around you. (*AtD*, p. 387)

This avian revelation of a 'gringo smoke cloud' reflects McClure's concept of the secular 'mystification' of the world, the narrowing of the cosmos from infinite and chaotic multiplicity to an ordered singularity. Pynchon posits that 'the real' is in fact a complex world of refracted opposites with a myriad of possibilities for spiritual (and political for that matter) alternatives to orthodox thought, a cosmology where 'readers who ignore the abundant doublings do so at their own peril.'¹⁸³ To accept the secular notion of there being 'one of everything' is to be 'mystified' by secular thought, in the face of a larger cosmology.

While technology in *Gravity's Rainbow* is framed through this 'smoke cloud' of the secular world, *Against the Day* places technology in a space where the magical and the non-secular intertwine with it, and technology is allowed to take on a postsecular resistant stance. This is a common theme for science and technology throughout the novel, but it is the narrative of Merle Rideout that handles this with the most clarity. Merle's story tracks the route of heterodox, postsecular technologies into the twentieth century, charting the eventual dissolution of their salvific possibilities. At one point in

¹⁸² Justin St.Clair, 'Binocular Disparity and Pynchon's Panoramic Paradigm', in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (ed.), *Pynchon's Against the Day: a Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (Newark, University of Delaware Press), p. 76.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 77.

his narrative we see Merle showing Lew Basnight the Tree of Diana whose fractal branches are used explicitly to both demonstrate this constant splitting of worlds, and to stake out Merle's status as a postsecular scientist.

“...Take some silver, amalgamate it with quicksilver, put it in with just the right amount and strength of nitric acid, wait. Damn if pretty soon it won't start to put out branches, just like a tree only faster, and after a while even leaves.”

“Branches,” said Lew.

“Right before your eyes – or lens, ‘cause you do need some magnification. Doddling said it's because silver is alive. Has its own forks in the road, choices to make just like the rest of us.” (*AtD*, p. 992)

This effect, known to the alchemists as Diana's tree or a *philosopher's tree*, gives Merle's chemistry demonstration a plethora of spiritual connotations. Its reference to Diana, goddess of the hunt, suggests an animistic unity, a communion with nature or at least some natural order. Diana is also linked to the moon, a spiritually feminine symbol, which is reminiscent of the Shekinah material from chapter two. The tree itself, a symbol of growth and fertility, gives birth in turn to a myriad of paths and possibilities that deviate from the secular scientific notion of linear time; the silver tree itself is representative of the postsecular concept of a living, breathing universe. Merle's technological endeavours thus straddle the worlds of science and magic, and by the grace of his hard-fought life and anarchist credentials, Pynchon treats Merle with a seriousness reserved for the most vital of his preterite champions. Jeffrey Severs writes, Merle is an exemplar of the preterite, postsecular communities of *Against the Day*, representing the 'many types of proletarian life, many means of survival, and many modes of being “against” the capitalist edifice.’¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Merle's life is one of hardship

¹⁸⁴ Jeffrey Severs, 'Women, Capitalism, and Artistic Represensation in *Against the Day*', in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (ed.), *Pynchon's Against the Day: a Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (Newark, University of Delaware Press), p. 225.

and sacrifice. His love of photography is supported by his various odd jobs, and he mourns for his separation from his daughter Dally, and his wife Erlys who leaves him for the illusionist Luca Zombini. Zombini himself has a lot in common with Merle. He is a master of bilocation and his magic tricks use Iceland spar to 'saw someone in half *optically*, and instead of two different pieces of one body, there are now two complete individuals walking around, who are identical in every way.' (*AtD*, p. 355) This is similar to Merle's tree of Diana showing deviant paths, and Frank's parrot claiming that people can be refracted, but the 'identical' nature of the copies do not suggest a salvific multiplicity of worlds, and instead are more akin to capitalist mass production. Salvation is indeed not present in Zombini's work, his daughter Bria works out that there is no 'happy ending' to their bifurcation. As I shall show below, Merle's work *does* lead to some degree of postsecular hope and communal reunification, with Dally and himself going 'back to being one person again.' What is fundamentally different in Zombini, is the nature of his intentions. Both he and Merle are engaging in acts of resistance, but in different ways. Merle seeks to cultivate a spiritual centre within technology in order to maintain certain postsecular possibilities. Zombini's intentions are more egotistical, a desire to harness the miraculous in resistance against 'those who sneer at us, and sneer at themselves for paying to let us fool them [...] this is a yearning *only* after miracle, *only* to contradict the given world.' (*AtD*, p. 354) His sense of resistance is similar, to show the world options and possibilities outside of it, but he lacks the ethical integrity of Merle and his sense of family and community. Zombini only desires to shatter the orthodoxy, whereas Merle seeks to build up refuges and spaces of protection from it. As Erlys says to Dally, 'Merle gave us a home. And your "real" father, well that is Merle, more than the other would ever've been.' (*AtD*, p. 357)

Merle, with the help of Roswell Bounce (Vibe's nemesis), finally brings together the technology of photography with the postsecular multiplicity in their invention, the Integroscope. This device allows for photography to go beyond simple still images but to view the subject across time, and also to see, like the many branches of the Tree of Diana, alternative possibilities¹⁸⁵, 'there is always the chance that those little folks in the pictures will choose different paths than the originals.' (*AtD*, p. 992) Through this device, Merle harnesses Pynchon's theme of refracted worlds, of there being an unlimited variety of heterodox worlds that defy the singular passage of time that is posited both by secular notions of time and the predeterminism of Calvinist dogma. As Lew asks Merle in the early development stages of the Integroscope, 'could you watch somebody go on to live a completely different life?' (*AtD*, p. 592) The device creates space for viewing salvific opportunities and escape.

As the novel moves into the twentieth century, Merle becomes paranoid (rightfully so) that the narrowing of the world has become a threat to his machine. He finds himself in Hollywood in the silent era, where the commercial success of the moving picture becomes the commercial and secular equivalent of his device. He is concerned about its theft; its co-option into the secular, and ultimately the loss and negation of its magical properties. He sees 'Gorillas out in the alley just standing, smoking, watching,' (*AtD*, p. 1050) and Roswell understands the true implication of the narrowing and rejection of the magical within the technology. Any act of resistance will be fruitless, 'we'll never kill em all,' he dejectedly states.

¹⁸⁵ The use of photographs as being able to penetrate a pluralist world is not a new one. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Schwarzkommando are (arguably) brought into existence via a British propaganda film, and in *Vineland* the counter-culture movement 24fps use film as a form of resistance. Slothrop's dissolution and dispersal at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* also contains photographic references. He is last seen in a photograph: "there's supposed to be a last photograph of him on the only record ever put out by The Fool, an English rock group." (*GR*, p. 742) It is interesting that Slothrop, a man whose life shifts and moves eventually into many paths, is shown in this way, and it is worth considering via *Against the Day* that this could have been achieved by Merle's integroscopic technology.

The Integroscope as a postsecular technology on the verge of being obsolete is not as simple as the secular forcing the reins of technology from the spiritual, but instead perceived as a takeover of one magical system by another. In a conversation between Merle and Webb Traverse at the beginning of the novel, Webb insightfully posits the idea that magic has not been ‘eliminated’ by secularism and capitalism, but instead remade in its image:

He paused, as if to catch his breath. “But if you look at history, modern chemistry only starts coming in to replace alchemy around the same time capitalism really gets going. Strange, eh?”

Webb nodded agreeably. “Maybe capitalism decided it didn’t need the old magic anymore.” An emphasis whose contempt was not meant to escape Merle’s attention. “Why bother? Had their own magic, doin’ just fine, thanks, instead of turning lead into gold, they could take the poor people’s sweat and turn it into greenbacks, and save that lead for enforcement purposes.” (*AtD*, p. 88)

This passage illuminates much of Pynchon’s stance on technology in *Against the Day*. It is not the differences between the secular, rational discipline of chemistry and the irrational, magic domain of alchemy that cause the friction in the novel, but the transition and reconsideration of alchemy, and the application thereof. Capitalism is seen as having its own magical systems – the oppressive systems of labour and greed – that work in parallel to older spiritual possibilities. The secular world is not secular at all in the strictest sense, but instead practices its own rites, processes that remove notions of spiritual plurality and salvation. Technology is merely a victim of such an attitude, a potentially salvific force broken down to solve one oppressive aim, to control. Merle’s tinkering with photography, framed through spiritual modes such as alchemy, offer a brief but powerful moment where science can be used in postsecular thought but, like the heretics in *Gravity’s Rainbow* who hunt those who seek multiple ontologies for the

Rocket, Merle and his device are hounded out of existence as capitalist control takes hold.

Merle's last use of the Integroscope, however, offers up the most scant, but arguably the most powerful, moment of resistance and hope in the novel. Facing the loss of the machine he fires it up one last time to view his daughter Dally. He watches her entire life, her passage through the novel and finally settles on the image of her as she is at the moment: '...her picture was speaking. A distant grown woman's voice propagating through the night aether clear as if she was in the room. He gazed at her, shaking his head slowly, and she returned the gaze, smiling, speaking without hurry, as if somehow she could see him, too.' (*AtD*, p. 1062)

In this powerful moment, Pynchon finally finds a functional, postsecular use of the Integroscope. Despite its inevitable loss, and by extension the inevitable loss of all the resistance forces in the novel be they the anarchists or the animist forces, it is allowed one final resistant act: to allow a communion between father and daughter to occur, the brief reunification of a family in the face of a capitalist edifice that abhors communal bonds, and seeks division and alienation. Like Zoyd Wheeler in *Vineland*, Merle finds brief solace and hope – and perhaps some salvation – by re-establishing his family links. As McClure states in his analysis of *Vineland*, 'parenting itself, Pynchon suggests, has been Zoyd's chief discipline and guide, and the Vineland community, human and natural, his retreat center.'¹⁸⁶ Merle, via the use of this hard-fought union between spiritual systems and technological 'pioneering', finds peace at last in the importance of the preterite community, the postsecular family unit, he accepts at last what Erlys has always said about him; his saving grace is that he is a good father. It is not his technological prowess that gives Merle's work its salvific properties, it is this

¹⁸⁶

McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 57.

understanding of community and care, which, as McClure writes, prepares 'individuals and communities today to resist the profound penetration of corporatist technologies of control.'¹⁸⁷

These small scale moments of resistant hope, 'our scruffy obligatory cry, our maximum reach outwards,' (*GR*, p. 136) are separate from the larger and more politically grand narratives of resistance. The final scene of *Against the Day* follows the Chums of Chance, as their airship departs the novel itself, and they remove themselves from an increasingly narrow world of which no longer have any viability in inhabiting:

And on they fly. The ship by now had grown as large as a small city. There are neighbourhoods, there are parks. There are slum conditions. It is so big that when people on the ground see it in the sky, they are struck with selective hysterical blindness and end up not seeing it at all.

Its corridors will begin to teem with children of all ages and sizes who run up and down the different decks whooping and hollering. The more serious are learning to fly the ship, others, never cut out for the Sky, are only marking time between visits to the surface, understand that their destinies will be down in the finite world. (*AtD*, p. 1084)

Kathryn Hume in 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*' claims that the final expression of the *Inconvenience* reflects Pynchon's new found affinity with the salvific possibilities of cities, a growing utopian space which fosters 'the possibility for sharing, for cooperation, for socialism and anarchism, or maybe just the piety that emerges from a need for community.'¹⁸⁸ Pynchon is indeed offering up the now city-sized airship as a sustained salvific space that extends beyond the 'temporary black market arrangements' of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and incorporates 'valid community living'¹⁸⁹. The city becomes a postsecular community, free of orthodox control, but yet it is not a completely redemptive space. As McClure is keen to make clear, postsecular

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 58.

¹⁸⁸ Hume, 'Religious and Political Vision', p. 176.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 183.

communities are defined by their preterite status, the struggle they face at maintaining their structure and persistence, and the hardships they face are manifest in how they function. The *Inconvenience* still contains 'slum conditions', and its invisibility to people on Earth suggests that it is an exclusion salvation, not available to all. Lastly, the community of the airship have a dubious future, not immediately acknowledged by Hume.

The novel closes with the optimistic line 'They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly towards grace.' (*AtD*, p. 1085) As I have shown previously, 'grace' is a problematic term, linked to Calvinist dogma. Pynchon here offers up grace as both the salvific pilgrimage of the *Inconvenience* and also, more bleakly, the transition from a pluralist world to the narrow, orthodox world of *Gravity's Rainbow* where the Elect rule and control the world via their divine mandate of grace. 'What is coming to part the sky' is also a problematic notion if we consider *Against the Day* making a historical segue into the twentieth century vision of the earlier novel. The transit of the airship transforms into the trajectory of the Rocket, its flight being the 'screaming [that] comes across the sky' (*GR*, p. 3) that opens the novel, or more chillingly, the salvific and magic technology that allows the growth of the airship becomes – like the splitting of the *Stupendica* – militarised by the master control system into a squadron of warplanes that 'batter *apart* the sky, shaking and ripping it.' (*GR*, p. 136, emphasis added) The postsecular zone of the *Inconvenience* is compromised, like all the resistant spaces of the novel, by the impending narrowing and militarisation of technology that is synonymous with the scientific progression of the twentieth century. The *Inconvenience's* possible transit from postsecular space to the militarised rocket suggests a grim inevitability because, as Paul Fussler states, 'War may

be the ultimate purpose of technological society. It is the business of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* to enact that conclusion.¹⁹⁰

What unifies the animistic material of Pynchon's work with this newer exploration into these heterodox technologies is Pynchon's application of magic. Returning to his introduction to *Stone Junction*, we can observe Pynchon candidly exploring his particular view of magic. He claims that Dodge, and implicitly himself, sees the magical as being bound up in the language and mechanisms of resistance:

The other kind of magic, the real stuff – long-practiced, all-out, contrary-to-fact, capital M Magic, not as adventurous spectacle, but as a pursued enterprise, in this very world we're stuck with, continually giving off readings – analog indications – of being abroad and at work, somewhere out in it.¹⁹¹

Pynchon uses magic and magical events as a method to reinforce a larger and more all-encompassing concern of his: the friction between the irrationality of resistant and salvific spiritual landscapes that express a pluralist and multitudinous cosmology, and the narrow and controlling orthodox world that promotes a singular, rational viewpoint. Magic by definition is irrational, miraculous, and more importantly, resists analysis and rational approaches. By the grace of this, it immediately is freed from the controlling systems in Pynchon's work, and its existence in a rational, post-Enlightenment world is utterly untenable. Attempts to analyse and dissect magical occurrences – the master control system's obsession with 'Analysis and Death' (*GR*, p. 722) – simply make the magical properties of an entity dissolve, where trying to understand its mechanisms 'down to a molecular level, [where] nothing magical remains,'¹⁹² and this narrowing of

¹⁹⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 320.

¹⁹¹ Pynchon, 'Introduction to *Stone Junction*', p. i

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. xii.

the ontology of magical structures means that 'all is revealed as simple repetitive drudgery.'

So by these terms, all things that resist the orthodox, 'narrowing' method of control in the novels have this magical property. Magic can be mostly considered to be present in all forms of Pynchon's spiritual resistances, but also present in the secular entities. However, the magic of the master control systems is not the magic of resistance, but rather the *co-opting* of magic. Power structures in Pynchon's novels use religious and spiritual tropes of their respective theologies (Calvinism, Puritanism, Gnosticism) to create secular frameworks, and create what we perceive to be the secular world. We have already encountered Webb Traverse's theory that capitalism is constructed out of an appropriation of alchemy, and in prior chapters explored both the contribution of Gnostic mysticism towards a totalitarian secularism and a Weberian connection between capital and Calvinism. The master control system takes irrational spiritual systems (specifically those that posit sovereignty and hierarchical structures) to forge 'rational' systems, that in turn seek to destroy and repress other irrational systems that oppose it.

Resistant magic both supports the presence of a plural, irrational and chaotic world, and provides a spiritual schematic for resistance. Magic as a flashy and wondrous affair is given short shrift, in favour of this concept of 'pursued enterprise', resistance that takes sacrifice and dedication. This contrast is evident between Merle Rideout and the mystical, bourgeois magicians of T.W.I.T.¹⁹³ Merle, as I have shown, masters his magical technology through his continued and celebrated status as a preterite hero; doomed to fail and have his Integroscope taken from him, beleaguered by

¹⁹³“The Worshippers of the Ineffable Tetractys.”: A Pythagorean cult based in London that provides a lot of influence behind the events in the novel. Based on an amalgamation of various Victorian occult societies, most notable Madame Blavatsky's Theosophers, and the Dalton Association.

poverty, a precarious way of life and the sacrifice of his close family unit. He is given in return a brief but hopefully heart-felt reunification with his family as a postsecular community. T.W.I.T on the other hand are those who revel in the spectacle of magic, and practice from a point of social luxury, not on the dangerous periphery of world as does Merle.

T.W.I.T. operate their magic as if it is fashionable fancy, oblivious to the true spiritual power in London, under their feet. 'All around them, just behind a vegetational veil tenuous as the veil of *maya*, persisted the ancient London landscape of sacred high places, sacrificial stones, and mysterious barrows known to the Druids and whoever they picked their way from.' (*AtD*, p. 252) There is no sign of a communion with a wider spiritual world, be it animist or otherwise, only 'little more than faddish embrace of the Latest Thing [...] only in it for, as they say, the aesthetics of the thing.' (*AtD*, p. 607) This bourgeois engagement with magic as superficial 'fun' is treated by Pynchon as nonsensical, holding no resistance function or even a serious engagement with the spiritual. It is instead a trope I have shown before in Pynchon, the misappropriation and thus the dismissal of the true resistant power of spiritual and magical thought. This notion of the co-option of the salvific side of the spiritual into secular modes is not new to *Against the Day*, but can be seen at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Lines of transmission are important when considering the value of magical occurrences in Pynchon's corpus. As I have explained at length previously (in the Herero section), it is the magical transmission of animism into the modernity that appears as the source of the Western terror of the wider world, and thus it obtains a degree of power over it. When Pynchon is discussing magic in his work (in particular magic that has some sort of salvific or resistant resonance) it is almost always in regards to alternative systems, a tool specifically for the preterite. The mystical content of the

Gnostic material that goes to form the power of the master control system is a separate entity, not synonymous with the magical material that exists within the 'resistance'.

Magic appears as less of a component of various religious structures (it is not the same as the term 'mystical', which in Pynchon's work seems to adhere more to an ascetic functionality more typical of Gnostic thought) and more of a cosmology or world-view in itself. It is antithetical to the rationalised Western mind-set, and antithetical to rationale itself, and thus becomes a resistant spiritual power, as it is the rational world that figures in Pynchon's work as the oppressive force.

As I have shown above, this idea of magic as this irrational, resistant force is (initially at least, I will come to how Pynchon evolves the concept soon) closely linked to Pynchon's own preoccupation with nostalgia and primordialism. Pynchon sees magic as a genuine system of transaction in a pre-Enlightenment world, with its power becoming 'neutered' as the rational world begins to take hold. We can see this in the Lyle Bland passage of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where Pynchon is discussing Freemasonry:

The magic in these Masonic rituals is very, very old. And way back in those days, it worked. As time went on, and it started being used for spectacle, to consolidate what were only secular appearances of power, it began to lose its zip. But the words, moves, and machinery have been more or less faithfully carried down over the millennia, through the grim rationalizing of the World, and so the magic is still there, though latent, needing only to touch the right sensitive head to reassert itself. (*GR*, p. 588)

This passage is very illuminating on the relationship between magic as a real entity, and the singularity of the master control system orthodoxy. Pynchon acknowledges that the spiritual practices of the Freemasons once held some real power, but in the post-Enlightenment age this connection to a genuine, magical/spiritual relationship has become mere ritual. This highlights two key features in Pynchon's

dialogue with ‘magic’: the first being the notion that a pre-lapsarian system which held an original magical resonance has become warped, misappropriated and co-opted as it is transmitted along history. The second shows that the magical and rational cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive bodies in opposition to each other (a conflict that is central to the totality of Pynchon’s corpus itself). The magical power of Freemasonry (typically Hermetic in nature) becomes neutralised as soon as it is being utilised to the benefit of the master control system.

Finally, we can now see that transmission and tradition – particularly the concept of a magical, ‘underground’ preterite spiritual tradition – is integral to Pynchon’s serious engagement with magic as a genuine force of resistance. The animistic material is of course the oldest tradition, blending the political and social deprivation of the preterite with a wider, more eco-critical narrative. This narrative blends into a pluralist attitude to early emergent technology with the same result. Where Pynchon sees this tradition divided is in its appropriation, whether that be the perceived secularisation of magic by capitalism or the onset of rational thinking and scientism, or the satirised take on fashionable magicians and spiritual shysters. To explore this in much more depth, I must now return to 1990’s *Vineland*, which sets up a savage dichotomy between the secularised misappropriation of spirituality against the ‘ancient’ thread of preterite religious tradition, to see both how the preterite, postsecular communities of *Vineland* resist the commercialisation of the spiritual, and what Pynchon perceives as serious, legitimate spiritual resistance.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Exploration of the New Age and the Postsecular in *Vineland*

The New Age

In 1990, Thomas Pynchon published *Vineland*, the second novel set in California. Different to *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the novel takes place in 1984, set in the aftermath of the counter-culture, and infuses the hippy legacy of those days with Orwellian notions of government surveillance and familiar Pynchonian notions of oppression and control. Reception of the novel was mixed, lamenting its lack of complexity previously seen in the encyclopaedic *Gravity's Rainbow*. However, despite its more traditional and tighter approach, *Vineland* still has a wealth of material that can be used to discuss Pynchon's approach to theological and spiritual matters.

The post-hippy setting of the novel allows Pynchon to the New Age spirituality that emerged in the Californian counter-culture of the 1960s and capitalist apparatus (Nixon's term in office, racism, C.A.M.P.). This subject matter at first seems unique to *Vineland*; Pynchon has previously considered the spiritual world and the secular, capitalist world as mutually exclusive, entirely antithetical to each other. Theological material in *Vineland* operates via doubling itself between being appropriated ephemera, and genuine spiritual options of resistance.

However, I have shown that this link between capitalism and spirituality before in Pynchon's novels. In *Gravity's Rainbow* we see a merging of secular technocracy blurring with the esoteric and Gnostic thought in the form of Dominus Blicero, the linking of technology with Animism in the form of the fictionalised Hereros. The later

novel *Against the Day* takes this further and explores possibilities of a connection between technological thought and magical thought. Aspects of that novel such as T.W.I.T. consider the idea of spirituality becoming consumer ‘fads’ and fashionable affectation. *Vineland* takes these concerns and explores how spirituality is transmitted back and forth between these positions, creating a third form of spiritual resistance that offers a complex renegotiation of how genuine spiritual power manifests itself.

As has become a typical occurrence in this thesis, this transmission is not a simple matter. At first, the commercialisation of spirituality in the novel is seemingly expressed as satirical, with Pynchon positing ludicrous chimeric institutions that combine both the lofty spiritualism of the esoteric practices so lauded by the New Age movement, and bloated Reaganite notions of consumerism, capital and free markets.

This satirical viewpoint does seem to be well-placed in Pynchon’s own apparent opinion regarding such spiritual matters. While Pynchon engages positively with a heterodox approach to religious practice, supporting a plurality of religions both mainstream and esoteric, the satire seems cutting and damning of the state of the post-hippy New Age movement. Priests act like Businessmen; the ever-present ‘Tube’ becomes a surrogate spiritual conduit. Consumer outlets such as the ‘Bodhi Dharma Pizza Temple’ combine sacred dogmas of Buddhism with the profane trappings of a cheap and gauche consumer outlet, which ‘a little smugly offered the most wholesome, not to mention the slowest, fast food in the region, a classic example of the California pizza concept at its most misguided.’ (VL, p. 45) This example expresses Pynchon’s vision of California as this false, hollow landscape where spiritual processes that require a degree of effort and striving are instead available for purchase at a nominal fee.

In his essay ‘Journey into the Mind of Watts’, where Pynchon examines the reasons for, and consequences of, the Watts Riots, he describes white California (and the

narrative of *Vineland* seems firmly embedded in this particular aspect of Californian culture) as an unreal space, a culture obsessed with notions of escape, and methods of diverting itself away from reality:

But alcohol is a natural part of the Watts style; as natural as LSD is around Hollywood. The white kid digs hallucination simply because he is conditioned to believe so much in escape, escape as an integral part of life, because the white L.A. Scene makes accessible to him so many different forms of it.¹⁹⁴

Pynchon continues in this essay to claim that these two methods of recreational intoxication; hallucinogens for the white kids, alcohol for the black kids, present us with a deeper understanding of the Californian divide. One provides a fabricated and pliable reality, while the other provides a dulling of reality.

This perhaps goes some way to explain the fact that the New Age movement seemed to cater mostly for the white Californians. The esoteric practices of the New Age allow for an appropriation of reality, a varied 'lucky dip' of world views and mythology, that, again, sometimes incorporated hallucinogenic experiences. Such a way of life, however, could be construed as a luxurious process, requiring a degree of privilege (whether it be financial, class or racial) in order to embark on in the first place. As someone sprayed across the gates of Esalen in 1990, the nexus of the Californian New Age, the movement can appear to be 'Jive shit for rich white folks.'

The racial bias in the demographic that practised the New Age movement also has other suggestions. Martin Ramstedt in his essay 'New Age and Business' links the movement to particular white American tropes. As a religious model, the New Age owes a perverse (considering its anti-establishment connotations, particularly in its

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Pynchon. 'A Journey into the Mind of Watts', *New York Times*. 12 June 1966, p. 264.

1960s heyday) amount to the American capitalist model, and he uncovers a strange relationship between the movement and secular business.

Ramstedt provides us with a history of the relationship between religion and capitalism. He refers to the 'protestantisation of religions'¹⁹⁵ that occurred in the eighties and nineties, the period in which Pynchon wrote *Vineland*. The Weberian concept of the Protestant Work Ethic was reignited by Thatcher and Reagan, and religious rhetoric was used to prop up the liberal free markets. As Ramstedt writes, 'This instituted a major conceptual shift, because the 'authorial self', that is, the enterprising individual making the 'right' consumerist choices was now projected as the 'authentic self', that is, a person who has full author- and ownership of his or her own actions.'¹⁹⁶

In this way, consumer choice was now closely connected with the self and self-identity, and the correct navigation of the secular free market allowed also the correct navigation of spiritual identity, where – simply put – religion veered away from mass participation, and towards individualism. In America this link allowed clever church leaders, previously finding their religion less and less relevant to the modern world, to revive the 'popular myth that associates Protestantism with the rise of capitalism.'¹⁹⁷ With this in mind, Pynchon's own mashing together of the corporate world and the spiritual seems to become prophetic. Four years after *Vineland* was published, we saw a huge insurgence of the religious apparatus into the corporate world.

As Ramstedt explains, in 1994 we saw Laurie Beth¹⁹⁸ of the Jones Group building advertising and marketing businesses around 'Jesus as an exemplary executive figure' (Ramstedt 189), in 1996 the Benedictine Rules (pertaining to the guidelines of

¹⁹⁵ Martin Ramstedt, 'New Age and Business', in J. R. Lewis and Daren Kemp (ed.), *Handbook of the New Age* (Brill: Leiden, 2007), p. 188.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 188.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 189.

¹⁹⁸ Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus CEO* (Hyperion: New York, 2001).

Benedictine Monks) was used by Norvene Vest as a particularly Franklinian method of integrating work into daily life. Steven Covey, a devote Mormon, to this day is hugely influential in the world of corporate management training. Ramstedt doesn't limit this shift to Christian America, but posits it as worldwide, a religious response to 'the workings of neo-liberal globalism.'¹⁹⁹ In the 1960s, Hindu gurus were known to use missionaries to transmit a Hindi nationalistic rhetoric across the slums of India. It was also Swami Chinmayananda who imported Yoga to the United States. Many other eastern spiritualities were packaged and sent abroad, with Hindu Yoga practices from India and the (then) marginalised Zen Buddhism of Japan finding themselves in a profitable market in Reaganite America.

Ramstedt manages to establish a link between the spiritual (not just the esoteric or the exotic, the Christian as well) and the free market capitalism of the latter twentieth century. However, the New Age movement, while at its most popular during this time, has roots in other typically Western notions of appropriation. Mikael Rothstein in his essay 'Hawaii in New Age Imaginations' explores the particular Californian appropriation of Hawaiian spirituality that occurred in the twentieth century. The modern West seems to have a desire to incorporate the Other in order to provide itself a quick, but often insincere, new form of spirituality²⁰⁰. Rothstein figures Hawaii to be a valid example of this behaviour, stating:

Probably the New Age conception of the land of Hawaii is just as much a religious interpretation of the overall western idea of Hawaii as an earthly paradise. The tourist industry is massive, and the driving force for all enterprises in business is always the same: Hawaii is the most exotic, most beautiful and most relaxing place on the face of the Earth. [...] New Agers are developing their own versions of the secular paradise myth by

¹⁹⁹ Ramstedt, 'New Age and Business', p. 188.

²⁰⁰ This becomes more apparent in the American obsession with Zen and Buddhism. I will be exploring how this fetishisation of the East works later in the chapter.

remodelling it into a religious narrative that lays the foundation for yet another industry; religious services of various kinds.²⁰¹

Here we can see the New Age developing into a business model, sourcing spiritual methods from all over the globe and collecting them into a commercialized entity for the Western market. Rothstein identifies this process as the 'neo-colonial actions of New Agers'²⁰², transforming this multitudinous exploration of new religious modes into a new form of imperialism. The New Age seeks out pockets of religious diversity, and conquers them under one banner, that of a neo-religious movement that while containing notions of resistance against established Western thought, also feeds back into and mirrors the colonial nature of that same entity.

Rothstein highlights the problematic nature of this process. While the initial intentions of the New Age may seem to be the proliferation, preservations and re-ignition of these different spiritualities, Rothstein questions whether or not this is at all achieved.

...but the question is whether the neo-colonial interpretation of ancient Hawaiian (or any spirituality or mythology 'plundered' in this fashion) religion implicates the survival of something or rather the transformation of something. [...] it seems clear that change and transformation are the predominant features of the phenomenon. Certain terms and concepts derived from old Hawaii are certainly used, but the context is so different that their meaning deviates significantly from the original.²⁰³

Rothstein's work on this particular problem seems to reflect poorly on the New Age movement. While seeking to engage with other spiritualities, Rothstein suggests that the movement is mired in that particular transmission. The world view of particular spiritual entities is ultimately alien to the West, and thus a certain degree of westernisation

²⁰¹ Mikael Rothstein, 'Hawaii in New Age Imaginations: A Case of Religious Inventions', in J. R. Lewis and Daren Kemp (ed.), *Handbook of the New Age* (Brill: Leiden, 2007), pp. 332-3.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 333.

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 333.

cannot be avoided in its transmission. Such alien concepts can be divided, analysed and made to fit as commodities in Western culture, thus robbing them of their original intent.

Such ‘culture clashes’ we have seen across Pynchon’s work. The Hereros, literally uprooted and placed into Europe in *Gravity’s Rainbow* only manage to maintain a pastiche of their traditions only to fade away into death. In *V*, the approach to death of the Sudwest Africans is utterly alien to their German oppressors, and thus become a phantasmal horror, avatars for an alien and savage Conradian Africa. In *Against the Day*, the T.W.I.T. are presented as fools who dabble luxuriously in the complexities of Kabbalah, Spiritualism and Hermeticism.... Pynchon’s work is full of this negotiation between the west and the spiritual Other, something we will discuss in detail later in this chapter.

In order to understand the New Age and Pynchon’s complex relationship within *Vineland*, one must first fully understand the history and methodology of the movement itself. I have mentioned before that the New Age posits some sort of resistance against the traditional orthodoxy of Western religion. The New Age is a particularly heterodox movement, resisting any sense of a formal doctrine in lieu of a more ‘DIY’ market-based approach. Rothstein states:

New Age discourse [...] often reflected in the negative connotations attached to the word ‘religion’, while the term ‘spirituality’ refers to everything good. Put in other terms, New Agers will typically adhere to religious authorities outside of the control of any formalised system. They will always prefer systems that are (presumably) esoteric and therefore restricted to the fortunate initiate or people with the mentality or understanding.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 336.

Rothstein's view of the New Agers posits a very personal spirituality, built around the individual's own spiritual needs and desires. In this fashion it shares similar tropes to the Gnosticism we have discussed earlier in this thesis, that being the focus on the mental facilities of the individual practitioner. However, the New Age - like Protestantism – seems to focus on the physical world, the spiritual well-being of the individual in this life. This blend of individualism and the attractive promise of a better life seem to allow the New Age to easily engage with notions of capital and consumerism.

This leads us into one of the key features of the New Age; its core facet, the need to distance itself from any centralised core. The New Age vehemently resists a dogmatic approach to spirituality seen in the more traditional religions, preferring to select aspects of exotic or esoteric practices. As Rothstein writes (in regard to Hawaii, but the same stands for the process in general), the New Age seeks out 'private or "folk" dimensions'²⁰⁵ of religions, and ignores the religion on a holistic level, selecting the pleasing elements of a spirituality and leaving out 'the public cult of the major gods, the sacredness of the chiefs, the human sacrifices, the holy wars, and so on.'

It would be appropriate here to state that this process robs the New Age of authenticity. Rothstein seems to suggest that the New Age lacks context for each element of a religion it appropriates, and retains a blinkered view of the religions it is engaging with, adopting aspects that could be packaged for the Western spiritual market, and ejecting any aspects that seem distasteful, centralised, or perhaps reminiscent of traditional Western religions. However, despite his initial defamation of the New Agers, Rothstein believes they do retain some authenticity in their approach. Rothstein appears to encourage flexibility and fluidity in religion, arguing that the New

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 336.

Age's engagement with the Hawaiian religion is a method used by all religious systems. But the 'authenticity' of the New Age does not make the religion have worth above that simple fact the Rothstein claims it is a genuine religion. The main concern he has with it is how the dialogue between the New Age and its sources plays out:

I am simply pointing to the fact that New Agers, in ways similar to Christian missionaries, are deconstructing a foreign religious system in favour of their own. Contrary to the Christians, though, the New Agers tend to believe that they are in full accordance with the 'exotic other'. They are not.²⁰⁶

The main concern Rothstein has here is how the material appropriated by the New Agers feeds back into the source (Hawaii). While the Missions sought to re-educate the colonies into Christianity, the New Age negotiated in a different way with the exotic. Instead of intentionally eliminating one system to be rewritten as another, the New Agers adopt and rewrite aspects of a spiritual system and then believe that their new composition remains the same as the source. The concern here is 'At some point, one may hypothesise, it will be impossible for ordinary people to distinguish between the historiography and theology of the New Agers and that of the traditional Hawaiians (or any people who have had their religion catch the eye of the New Agers).'²⁰⁷

In this way, Rothstein identifies a potential violent that the New Age is committing. While the collage of religions that makes up the New Age is in itself a legitimate and authentic religion in itself, it also proposes to have authentic links to each source, links which are simply not there. Traditional practices can be swept up in this, repackaged into something unrecognisable that then replaces it. The New Age, with this in mind, seems to find the spirituality of the Exotic Other just as alien and repugnant as

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 337.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 338.

Christianity (and other traditional religious systems) does, but instead of eliminating it, it adopts it and morphs it into something that can be sold piecemeal to each individual consumer.

The New Age, unlike other religions that tend to resist, is a theological system that embraces (and thus could only be born within) modernity. We can see from our investigations that the movement *relies* on consumerism and a deification of the individual in order to exist. However, to condemn the entire movement itself, is to deny its fluidity. In *New Age: A Guide*, Daren Kemp expresses a difference between the philosophy of the New Age as a movement in itself and the practices of the New Agers, claiming:

...disciples of New Age thought as expounded by New Agers themselves, are to be distinguished from the philosophy of the New Age. In the same way there are distinct forms of Christian, Muslim and Buddhist thought - for example in cosmology – which are to be distinguished from etic understandings of, say, the psychology of Christians or the history of Buddhist ideas.²⁰⁸

The same problem occurs in scholarly research of the New Age itself. Kemp depicts different schools of thought have contradictory approaches to the movement, for example the 'Christian apologist has often described New Age as a cult', and 'the psychologist describes it as a form of narcissism.'²⁰⁹ This incompatibility lies in the separation between the mechanics at work in the creation of the New Age, and the plethora of religious ideas that make it under the term. A simplified explanation of this problem would be that the New Age defies traditional modelling under theological examination, due to the fluidity, decentralisation and rapid change inherent in the

²⁰⁸ Daren Kemp, *New Age: A Guide: Alternative Spiritualities from Aquarian Conspiracy to Next Age*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

movement. It does not reflect one dogma by its definition; it is the religion of the individual, so this pluralist approach to dogma goes hand in hand with a modern, neo-liberal sense of individualism. Sociologist Dominic Corrywright in his examination of the New Age, *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations into New Age Spiritualities*, claims that the New Age approach to spirituality reflects a holistic approach to a modern world in rapid flux.

...within New Age thinking there is a further, underlying cause for the development of theories, norms and indeed local specificities which is interrelation of all aspects of the whole with each other. In this view, paradigms (or worldviews) and paradigm shifts are the result of the multiple confluences of the mundane and the cosmic, a web-like form of interactions. In essence this is an epistemology that recognises the total interdependence of all minutiae of existence. So, the Zen Buddhist teacher characterises an aspect of New Age thinking, as well as Zen cosmology when she states: 'When a mote of dust rises, the whole universe rises with it'.²¹⁰

Corrywright in his examination of the New Age is adamant that the movement can only be correctly comprehended with this approach in mind, an overview that instead of prescribing a cosmology upon the world (as major religions operate) it becomes *symptomatic* of the world, taking on the shifts in the world and reflecting them via a vast resource of difference theological modes.

The importance of understanding this is crucial to unpacking how Pynchon relates to the New Age in his texts. With the definitions both Kemp and Corrywright provide, we can see there is a gulf between the ground-level interactions of the New Agers with esoteric world religions, and this larger holistic theory behind it. So while Rothstein laments the lack of holistic thought within the New Age when appropriating its religious content, Corrywright claims the component parts of the New Age form a holistic world-

²¹⁰ Dominic Corrywright, *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations into New Age Spiritualities*. (Oxford: P. Lang, 2003), p. 46.

view. It is the case of one whole being plundered and violently placed into the context of a larger, entirely fabricated, whole. Thus, the doctrines subsumed into the New Age are stripped of their power, and removed from the larger traditions that Pynchon claims are so important to a genuine religious discourse.

The notion of the New Age existing as an entirely new and postmodern religious modus operandi bears no value judgement of the individual chimeric religions it fosters. The practices of the New Age can still remain consumerist, spiritually bereft and imperialist, but the mechanism in which they operate still has potential salvific properties, and appears to be a generally very interesting system to Pynchon.

Divining Pynchon's approach to the New Age is problematic. As we have seen, the New Age movement is difficult to define, and thus confusion can arise when trying to analyse Pynchon's critical engagement with the movement. Kemp depicts the New Age as a wide variety of topics, from the esoteric (spiritualism) to the pseudo-scientific (homoeopathy) to sociological disciplines (Women's Studies groups),²¹¹ and thus the nebulous nature of the topic defies a simple comparative analysis.

However, Kemp does include abridged studies from sociologists who have attempted to unite the New Age into a model of a defined ideology. He cites Michael Donahue, a sociologist who developed a list of affiliations with the New Age among American Protestant communities, as someone who has approached this problem. Kemp paraphrases Donahue's criteria (the original containing 504 different responses), which serves as a useful measuring tool:

- a) Human nature is basically good...
- b) I believe in reincarnation – that I have lived before and will experience other lives in the future...

²¹¹ Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*, p. 84.

- c) I believe in astrology...
- d) Through meditation and self-discipline I come to know that all spiritual truth and wisdom is within me...
- e) I am in charge of my own life – I can be anything I want to be...
- f) It is possible to communicate with people who have died...
- g) An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church...²¹²

Of course, this criteria is not and can never be a complete survey of the New Age, a spiritual movement that is in constant flux and change, and incorporates an inestimable amount of religious ideas, but serves us as a model of the more common and typical beliefs that the New Age incorporates.

History of the New Age

We have discussed before the difference between the New Age movement and the more orthodox traditional religious structures, in regards to the latter being prescriptive and the former being symptomatic. This particular difference is worth exploring, in order to fully understand the connection between the New Age movement and the social topography of the twentieth century.

For a sociological and historical exploration of this radical growth in a new, modern theology, we can turn to the illuminating essay 'The Origins of "New Age" Religion' by Steven Sutcliffe. In this essay, Sutcliffe acknowledges the origin of the New Age as a popular, expansive religious movement to the explosion of modernist ideas and attitudes in the inter-war years, where a new spirituality was born between 'the double shadow of

²¹² Ibid, p. 86.

war – past and future.²¹³ Sutcliffe argues that it was in this crucible of change, uncertainty and fear that formed the spiritual exploration that took hold in America and the middle and latter part of the twentieth century:

It is a key period in explaining the roots of 1960s developments in ‘new age’, and 1980s development in ‘holistic’ religion, as well as of the roots of Wicca, and hence of the twentieth century Pagan revival more widely. The period is therefore historically determinative of powerful currents in recent anglophone religious history.²¹⁴

Sutcliffe posits the esoteric material that we know recognise as New Age thought was fuel for a large desire stoked already by the modernist interest in rapid and dizzying scientific breakthroughs, new understandings in psychology and philosophy and a post-Victorian Wellsian interest in what the next century will bring. Coupled with the disaster of the Great War, European traditional religions found themselves largely outdated. While they attempted to ‘cope with reactions to the carnage of the western front through appeal to the authority of tradition,’²¹⁵ there was a ‘perceived stasis’ ascribed to religion, and a new spiritual form was sought, one that incorporated what Sutcliffe calls a *quest culture*. This approach eliminates the orthodox process of spiritual truth being passed down hierarchically from an authoritarian ‘mother church’, and instead empowers the aspirant (whom Sutcliffe refers to as a ‘seeker’) with their ability to seek his or hers own individual religious truth – not unlike the ascetic or Gnostic spiritualities seen throughout history. Here, perhaps, we see the popular beginnings of the spiritual marketplaces we saw fully formed in the 1980s American New Age scene. As Sutcliffe writes:

²¹³ Stephen Sutcliffe, ‘The Origin of “New Age: Religion between the two World Wars”’. In J. R. Lewis and Daren Kemp (ed.), *Handbook of the New Age*, (Brill: Leiden, 2007), p. 72.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 51.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 50.

With this culture, seekers pursued a distinctively modern, psychologised, 'post-protestant' form of religion, which they increasingly referred to as 'spirituality' and set over against dominant traditions. In addition to the quest culture of middle class and upper class social elites, a more popular religious culture consolidated around astrology, divination, healing and positive thinking. Hence the 'non-official' religion of the interwar period, like religious formations generally, was heterogeneous, affected by class, gender, ethnicity and other social variables and marked by internal debates over nomenclature and interpretation.²¹⁶

From Sutcliffe's interpretation of the beginnings of what would later be known as the New Age movement, we can see two very immediate points of interest that forge connections between the social history of the New Age, and the theological framework we are attempting to construct around Pynchon's texts. The first point that Sutcliffe throws some light on, is that the emergent New Age movement was rebellious in nature. Its proliferation lies in the inability of conventional orthodox religious frameworks to successfully apply them in a 'useful' fashion to the rapidly changing world of the modernist age, and also allow people to comprehend the issues raised by the mass destruction of the Great War (and the further destruction of the Second World War). The New Age instead delivered a plethora of theological angles that provided people a more immediate solution to these problems. This is an interesting concern for Pynchon, with his focus on the opposition between plurality and singularity, and we can see here another example of the doubling effect: the use of a pluralist take on religious modes in a system that becomes critiqued and questioned in *Vineland*.

The second point of interest raised by Sutcliffe is how the New Age movement tends to differ from the orthodoxy in providing succour for its practitioners. While the tradition western religions only allowed 'retreat' from the physical and increasingly

²¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 50-51.

bewildering world at hand in its doctrines of a distant and obscure salvific goal, the New Age provided a closer and more intimate sense of salvation, that appeared much more comforting to its practitioners in the face of the mass death of the European wars. This varied of course from the appropriation of Eastern traditions such as reincarnation to the popular Spiritualist churches that allowed its congregation to involve themselves in immediate and personal contact with the dead. Simply put, while the traditional Western religions provided a promise of comfort in a life to come, the New Age provided results that could be acquired there and then to the practitioner. Pynchon's texts discuss this difference also, with the promise of some eschatological solution to the World's problems weighed against the desire for a redemptive 'zone' in the here and now. Kemp explores this notion further. 'New Agers tend to emphasise well-being in this lifetime as the goal of their spirituality, whereas traditional Western religiosity has held our promises of an improved life to come, whether in heaven, paradise or a bodily resurrection.'²¹⁷

This notion of immediate spiritual 'progress' became more appealing than the more distant and intangible alternative, also due to the changing social situation of the twentieth century. Distant salvation, the uneasy book-keeping of sin versus virtue, now seemed positively archaic, a relic that no longer applied to a world shaped not only by a new breed of mechanised warfare, but also the beginnings of a mass consumer culture. It seemed odd for religion to not be available as a commodity, a kind of instant gratifying fix in the same way the rest of the world was opening up into. Kemp claims this notion has been 'often criticised for the immediacy of their goals; a spiritual technique can be bastardised into a "quick fix",'²¹⁸ but never-the-less the New Age

²¹⁷ Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*, p. 58.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 58.

provided in this immediacy a modern method of spiritual consumption that provided for the modern age. From this we can see how the New Age, as it developed, grew to co-exist with capitalism at its zenith in the 1980s.

A particularly common thread among New Age spiritualities is how they deal with death. It is obvious when considering the environment that the New Age (as a mass spiritual method) was birthed in, that death and ways of dealing with and figuring death would become an important aspect of the movement. While the orthodoxy generally prescribe a system of death then resurrection into a paradise (or the less inviting option of a hell), the New Age prefers to enter in conversation with traditional Eastern notions²¹⁹. Of course, in the familiar style of the New Age, such notions become distorted in their transmission from the source, as Kemp describes:

It will be seen that this New Age understanding of the means and end of salvation differs also from traditional Eastern notions. This is despite the fact that New Agers are often highly conversant with Eastern traditions and may use their terminology.²²⁰

It is in the way that the New Age choose to relate to the esoteric and ‘exotic’ theological practices of the East that we can learn a lot about how the movement functions at its core. From what Kemp describes using his example of the adoption of karma and karmic cycles, we can determine a few points as to the mechanics of the movement. Kemp writes:

For example, the notion of karma is also used by New Agers. They may take it to mean something akin to destiny, or perhaps relate it to actions undertaken in past lives having effect in the current life. Very seldom,

²¹⁹ The notable exception to this is the Spiritualist churches, which instead place the dead in another ‘plane of existence’. But unlike traditional Western doctrine, the dead can be conversed with and interacted with, and eventually be reunited with after the practitioners own dead.

²²⁰ Kemp, *New Age: A Guide*, p. 59.

however, do New Agers simply take over traditional Hindu or Buddhist understandings of karma. The idea of escaping from the suffering, *dukha*, of the earthly cycle of birth and death, *samsara*, is not a typical New Age concept. Neither do New Agers share the Buddhist notion that the *atman*, soul, is non-existent and non-transferrable at death; New Agers tend to believe in a perennial human spirit or essence which transfers from body to body at death and birth.²²¹

It appears that there are particular aspects of the theologies adopted that the New Age movement tends to avoid, generally speaking. The New Age tends to ignore any notions of sufferance, in particular any notion that promotes suffering as a necessity of salvation, or a 'rite of passage'. Most punitive notions are also jettisoned, the traditional view of a perdition for the wicked is lost and instead the re-imagined system of karma bad luck and misfortune to misdeeds done in past lives, or a nebulous idea of future misfortune at the hands of misdeeds done in this life. This leads to one key difference between the traditional Western religions and the New Age movements; a radical shift in its ethical system.

In Western religion and the Abrahamic traditions, morality and death have been irrevocably linked. The destination of a practitioner was entirely dependent on his or hers adherence to the moral code dictated by a particular doctrine; a righteous man was destined for paradise and/or communion with God, and the wicked condemned to perdition or eternal death. These fates were irreversible and static. While this theological notion dictated an ethical code to the believer, a 'terrible mass above' that a believer must work with to assure a preferable 'experience' after death, the New Age instead focuses on a comforting and less draconian image of life after death. The experience after death is almost always a pleasant one, unconcerned with the moral nature of the practitioner. Pleasant and reassuring afterlives seem to almost be a

²²¹ Ibid, p. 59.

prerogative of the New Ager. For example, as Kemp states, 'spiritualist messages tend to be comforting worlds of consolation from departed loved ones,'²²² and seldom pushes beyond comforting the individual, such as elements that might seem foreboding or prophetic.

This also occurs in the New Age's appropriation of the Eastern spiritualities. While traditional notions of karma are dependent on the moral course of the individual, this is greatly downplayed in New Age thought. As Kemp explains:

...reincarnation also provides reassuring memories from past lives and deaths. Some New Agers believe that the soul chooses the moment to reincarnate and become discarnate. [...] many New Agers are not bothered by the risk of their present actions affecting a future life, as in traditional doctrines of karma. Other New Agers are less concerned about long-term future life, but are comforted by their beliefs about the immediate period after death.²²³

This lack of a strict moral centre to the New Age movement lends to its fluidity, both in its theological composition, and how it relates to the notion of belief itself. Kemp claims that many New Agers may be polytheistic, incorporating many divine beings and rituals from a host of religious structures, but presses that 'New Age polytheism is not necessarily to be understood in exactly the same way as ancient polytheism, since many New Agers interpret the existence of the gods psychologically.'²²⁴ A prime example of this notion is the New Age embracing psychoanalytical work, such as Jung's archetypes. In the New Age there seems to be an entirely feasible link between the theological and the scientific, something will be engaged with later in this chapter.

²²² Ibid, p. 57.

²²³ Ibid, p. 59.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 56.

One major trope of the New Age movement that binds both this positive outlook to death and this particular form of polytheistic belief is a pantheistic belief in unity. The New Age tends to depict all things existing as a holy *part* of a divine wholeness. This holistic attitude to the world is something we have encounter before in our exploration of the New Age, and is reminiscent of other religious structures we have seen at play in Pynchon's texts. It could possibly be derived from the holistic endgame of Gnostic belief structures (the *plemora*, the *Tikkun* etc.) but once again it generally jettisons the less appealing aspects of Gnosticism; the rejection of the physical and the demiurgic, the asceticism or the sheer level of personal sacrifice that must be undertaken by a Gnostic practitioner.

Kemp describes two different New Age traditions around this idea of a holistic universe. One tradition is described as 'both pantheist and monist, in that everything is believed to be part of the One God or Reality. God is to be found in each individual, each animal, each star, each tree, all is God.'²²⁵ The second tradition is 'panentheism' something of a compromise with conventional Christianity, and a common thread in Christian New Age movements. 'This is the belief that while God may be found in everything, God is something more than the totality of all things. Panetheism thus attempts to retain Christian notions of a fundamental divide between God and creation, while at the same time emphasising their unity and interactivity.'²²⁶ In both of these notions, there is the core idea that all people retain a portion of the divinity of the universe within themselves (as in Gnostic traditions), and therefore becomes elevated as an individual, in both themselves and how they interact with the environment around them. The entire world to the New Ager becomes holy, and thus the importance of well-

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 57.

being to the practitioner becomes important to the universe in general. The New Ager is both worships the divine, and is the divine, a theological notion that rejects the religious dogma of a previous age, where the divine realm – distant and beyond mortal reach – delivers decrees to the people who serve it. However, New Ageism is never held up as a preterite spirituality, but instead the co-option of it. It is not the messy pluralism that Pynchon depicts as salvific, but instead he demands a more rigorous and focused pluralism at acts in opposition to the mechanisms of the New Age.

Postmodernity and Religious Structuring

Now we have seen how the cultural shifts, both modern and postmodern, created a radical new method of religious consumption, but before we continue discussing how Pynchon relates to this material, it is worth briefly contemplating how the postmodern affects theology in the post-war world. David Lyon's book *Jesus in Disneyland* discusses how – through the metaphor of a Christian festival being held as Disneyland – religion and the secular modern age, two seemingly opposed structures, manage to co-exist in the post-war era.

The traditional post-enlightenment grand narrative lends the belief that the massive social and cultural changes of the Enlightenment tended towards the eventual decline of a religious frame of mind. As Lyon's writes;

It is often said that when premodern religions met modernity, from the seventeenth century onwards, relations were less than cordial. The scientific-technological revolution, the burgeoning of industrial capitalism, the rise of urbanism and democratic policies often had an abrasive and corrosive effect on organised religion. The mathematician Laplace took no

trouble to inform the French emperor that he “had no need of the hypothesis” of God. For many others, the process was implicit, where the “hypothesis” was quietly dropped. Religious vestiges gradually succumbed to the evolutionary forces of modernity. Or so the story goes.²²⁷

But as we can see, this is not the case. Religion as an attitude did not simply disembark the culture as an epoch of rational thought and scientific endeavour began, but instead morphed and shifted itself around such changes. In the postmodern age, the grand narratives of the large, dictatorial religious structures began to (but not completely) crumble, and the New Age movement offered those who could not find a concordance between the modern day and the premodern religious modes. It is important here to consider the New Age not as a religious movement in itself, a set of reinvigorated ‘old gods’ riding roughshod over the ‘orthodox religions of old’, but as a method of consuming religion, a mechanic for the dissemination of religious thought. Now there is no paradox at play between theological and the secular a plethora of spiritual options open up, as Lyon’s writes:

Once religious activity is free of the secularisation straightjacket, however, we discover all sorts of other ways to consider it sociologically. British sociologist James Beckford, for instance, concludes that religion is best thought of as a cultural resource. In this way, religion can be seen to “convey symbols of newly-perceived social realities”, whether to do with ethnicity, ecology, or the emancipation of women, and to be combined in flexible and unpredictable ways with all kinds of ideas and values.²²⁸

What Lyon is trying to portray in the opening chapters of his book is that religion is not the anathema of the postmodern age – a structure so vast, impenetrable and unchangeable that it resists, or at best falls to converse with, the fluidity and flux of the modern world – but instead a fundamental tool for understanding and engaging with it.

²²⁷ David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 2.

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 9

Instead of maintaining its structure and becoming obsolete in the modern age, religion has instead adopted new methods of transmission that can co-exist with it.

This transformation of spirituality allows for the arrival of a multitude of religious ideas that emerge in countless directions much like the cauldron of possibilities that is Pynchon's own *Zone*. It is curious in this regard to see modern theologians express modern religious phenomena in such a similar fashion to Pynchon's own religious frameworks. As Lyons continues to say:

As we explore the world of the new media and of consumer identities in relation to expressions of faith and of religious commitment, we shall find [...] that there are no simple answers. The demise of regulated, institutional religion seems to open space for all manner of alternatives, as rapid as they are unpredictable.²²⁹

However, Pynchon's postmodern religious framework is not completely analogous to this particular postmodern theology. Whereas in Pynchon (at least, pre *Vineland*) the notion of this new religious freedom is primarily a resistant act against a controlling, centralised capitalist core, in actuality it becomes a much more ambiguous affair. While the New Age in its infancy (as we have already seen) did project a rebellious front against the increasingly irrelevant religious orthodoxy, in the post-war years it did begin to adopt the apparatus of secular postmodernity as it evolved into the theology we see today.

In *Jesus in Disneyland*, Lyon initiates his thesis by stating the apparent problem with a Christian festival being held in Disneyland; what does a pre-modern religious structure possibly have to do with the prime symbol of capitalist America that is Disneyland. His answer to this follows on from what we have discussed; that religion –

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

in order to remain a relevant and perhaps even vital part of culture has taken on the very same trappings. Lyons' argument hinges on the fact that Disney represents the core values of America in postmodern age. The epitaph of the book itself comes from Jean Baudrillard:

It is Disneyland that is authentic here! The cinema and TV are America's reality! The freeways, the Safeways, the skylines, speed, deserts – these are America, not the galleries, the churches, the culture.²³⁰

Lyons continues to state that Disney, a simulation of America itself as well as history, literature and mythology stands as a perfect metaphor for postmodernity. Lyon cites *Spy Magazine's* (an American satirical magazine, of whom Disney is a popular and frequent target) definition of *Disneyfication*: 'the act of assuming, through the process of assimilation, the traits and characteristics more familiarly associated with a theme part... than with real life.'²³¹ Postmodern culture seems to be entirely enacted by Disney, collecting disparate real-world experiences into constructed thematic groups, or 'theming'. 'Theming may be seen as postmodern surrogates for temporary narratives (even 'meta narratives') which, however fragmentary or temporary, tell tales within which lives may be located.'²³² Heritage and mythology are exhumed from any temporal position they once had and transmitted now as consumable experiences, laden with a Disneyfied sheen that transmits also the conservative agenda of the corporation, or in a wider sense, any agenda desired. In these simulacra, personal enjoyment is paramount, 'FUN is the goal.'²³³ If Disney (as a symbol of consumerist America) is the final product of the postmodern secular world, then the New Age movement works as a

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 1

²³¹ Ibid, p. 3.

²³² Ibid, p. 5.

²³³ Ibid, p. 12.

parallel product of the religious postmodern. It harvests a wide source of theological material from a huge number of varied sources, and transmits them back in thematic groups, that the individual (as with Disney, the individual is the central figure of the New Age experience) can consume at ease and at leisure. It could be argued that the New Age is a simulation of religion, offering up a sanitised marketplace of religious experiences masquerading and holding themselves over the original religious form. Lyon states:

Heritage becomes instant and the immediate purges the historical memory, even as it is simulated in film footage and hands-on interactive experiences. Farewell to Hugo's hunchback; hello to safe suffering.²³⁴

While Lyon is referring to his theory that the postmodern Disneyfication of history, literature and myth is eroding the original source transmissions of these entities, it could easily be attributed to the New Age.

This commercialisation adopts a desire similar to that of the preterite spiritualities: to seek a magical and salvific alternative to an increasingly rational and singular world. As Arnaldo Vento claims in 'Rediscovering the Sacred': 'As we approach the end of the [twentieth] century, many educated people in the Western world long for some type of spirituality akin to the traditional religious path'²³⁵ We can corroborate Vento's statement by what we have already unearthed in the mechanics of the New Age Movement: the desire of people for supernatural contact amidst a proliferation of the rational and the secular. This constant resistance of religion and the magical suggests it still holds a power that no other ideology can replicate. As Jurgen Habermas writes:

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

²³⁵ Arnaldo C. Vento, 'Rediscovering the Sacred: From the Secular to a Postmodern Sense of the Sacred', *Wicazo Sa Review*, 15/1 (2000), p. 193.

[Religion is the] bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this context eludes the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses. Philosophy cannot provide a substitute for consolation.²³⁶

This notion of consolation hearks back to the post-war origins of the New Age, the emotional desire that a belief in the magical sates, which the secular struggles to achieve. Jacques Derrida suggests an even more vital proposal for the necessity of religion in society: 'Once mystery has been denied, it takes very little to envisage an inevitable passage from the democratic to the totalitarian.'²³⁷

Pynchon's novels not only reflect the interplay between the religious and the secular, but explore this inherent importance of the mystical in the world. He both posits its ineffable power and uniqueness in the world, as per Habermas, but also its vital power for resistance and freedom that Derrida alludes to. *Vineland* explores this within two worlds: the first being the quest for viable and resistant religious ideas, and the second drives the the New Age appropriation and simulation of spirituality.

Hector Zuniga, the tweaked-out narcotics officer, calls the hippy counter-culture movement 'that little fantasy hand job you people were into' (VL, p. 27), in a conversation with Zoyd Wheeler, in the opening chapters of *Vineland*. Much of the novel's material on the counter-culture of the sixties appears as a savage critique of the movement's legacy in the eighties. The New Age theology and philosophy it honed are morphed by Pynchon into something vapid and consumerist. This tone is established from the outset of the novel, with Zoyd's defenestrative drag show changing from an immediate, manic and dangerous action, into a considered, oddball and safe media event. The fake glass window which Zoyd launches himself unsatisfactorily through

²³⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press., 1993), p. 34.

²³⁷ Jacque Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 34.

serves as an accusation towards the latter days of the New Age: 'There was hardly any impact, and it all felt and sounded different, no spring or resonance, no volume, only a sort of fine, dulled splintering' (VL, p. 12), and Zoyd, realising the window has been replaced, says 'Euchred again, Hector, thanks.' This chapter serves to establish the theological theme of the novel; where the genuine has been replaced by the empty and the simulated, and as Zoyd laments being cheated 'again', we can't help but recall that this degradation and replacement of religion is a common trope across Pynchon's work. It highlights the degradation and replacement of valued and important religious systems towards an easier, marketable, neo-liberal movement.

One of the keys to unpacking how this works in *Vineland* is to move towards an understanding of how Pynchon treats the counter-culture across the novel. While the novel does function (on one level at least) as a satire on the Sixties, Pynchon still appears to hold a genuine fondness for it. As Alan Wilde in his essay 'Love and Death in and around Vineland, U.S.A.' states:

Is there any larger hope in *Vineland* as a whole? [...] does there emerge some time or place that embodies Pynchon's repeated pursuit of what is at best an elusive goal? Not unexpectedly, given the genealogy of Pynchon's fiction, it is the sixties that offer themselves as the most plausible candidate, and the novel does indeed present from time to time an idea or ideal form of the decade that readers of a certain age will find familiar.²³⁸

Wilde is correct here, we can support Pynchon's interest in the Sixties from the publication of *Inherent Vice* in 2009, another exploration of the Sixties that feels very similar tonally and thematically to *Vineland*. However, *Inherent Vice* is set closer to the era it is analysing than *Vineland*, which makes Wilde's following claims all the more interesting:

²³⁸ Alan Wilde, 'Love and Death in and around Vineland, U.S.A.', *Boundary*, 18/2 (1991), p. 171.

Whereas Oedipa's alternative America is placed firmly in the past (or in the parallel world of the Tristero), *Vineland's* other, greener, freer America is alive enough around 1969 to be under siege and dying. The effect of this is telling. By locating the ideal in the lifetime of his characters, Pynchon betrays again his nostalgia for the regretted time before the eclipse of [the Sixties counter-culture].²³⁹

Inherent Vice is set at what Pynchon determines to be the breaking point of the counter-culture movement: the arrest and trial of Charles Manson. The novel reflects this mood – *Inherent Vice* is a novel of disillusionment, full of lost souls and characters burnt out from the hippy lifestyle. It exists as a darker novel than *Vineland*, which contains darkness of its own, as Wilde points out: 'Still, however impassioned these occasional tributes are, there is another, darker side to Pynchon's portrait of the age, with its betrayals, shallowness, irresponsibility, and fears, its obsessive avoidance of death...' ²⁴⁰ Wilde could just as easily be referring to the themes in *Inherent Vice*, themes we will be exploring in detail later in this chapter.

If the California trilogy²⁴¹ could be treated as a meta-narrative, the focus of the narrative is moving temporally closer and closer towards the Sixties as a wellspring of potential salvation, a point that holds the most transcendental promise in Pynchon's mind. *The Crying of Lot 49* focuses on a hidden revelation, an impenetrable core never revealed, *Vineland* tries to reveal the sixties as that revelation and in the process begins a hectic discourse with it, and finally *Inherent Vice* goes even further into the horrors of the era. While no absolutes are drawn from this *tightening into*, we can see Pynchon growing more and more critical of his notion of the Sixties as a salvific space. As Wilde

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 171.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 172.

²⁴¹ I am willing at this stage to commit to the notion of these three texts existing also as one text. They have a thematic connection that runs through them all, and while Pynchon's novels do all share themes and interplay with one another, these three novels all seem to achieve a goal that exceeds the sum of their parts.

writes, 'more is at stake [...] than complex reactions to a complex period. In problematizing all of the decade's longings, Pynchon simultaneously problematizes his own.'²⁴²

As Pynchon spirals towards the Sixties (on a literary journey than spans a 43 year interest in the Californian counter-culture) and we see him having an increasingly cynical viewpoint on the era, we not only can determine the obvious – Pynchon's changing attitude to the Sixties as he matures as a writer – but also a reassessment of his own beliefs about salvation, and his transcendent religious discourse in general. With this in mind, *Vineland* becomes a chaotic and cluttered novel, a text that acts as a battleground for the author's own changing and conflicting views on what truly acts as a salvific space in his texts. And while *Inherent Vice* may shift towards a more profane reading the Sixties and its 'accoutrements', *Vineland* lies at the centre of this maelstrom.

It is this tension between the Sixties-as-ideal and the Sixties-as-failed that makes *Vineland* such a compelling text. While in earlier texts the salvific is always obscured, a gnosis kept hidden and apart from the reader by Pynchon's strange and esoteric mysticism, in *Vineland* the hidden is on the cusp of being revealed, and whether it can remain robust under the light or wither, forms one of the most interesting aspects of the novel, theologically speaking.

Even the title of the novel holds a conflicted meaning. It alludes to 'Vinland', the name given to America by the Scandinavian settler Leif Eriksson, who landed on the American continent nearly 1000 years prior to the novel. This is explicitly referred to in the novel '...he must have chosen right for a change, that time they'd come through the slides and storms to put in here, to harbour in Vineland, Vineland the Good.' (VL, p. 322) The phrase 'Vineland the Good' is lifted from the *Saga of Erik the Red* where

²⁴² Wilde, 'Love and Death', p. 172.

'During this time much talk took place in Brattahlid about making ready to Vinland the Good, and it was asserted that they would find there good choice lands.'²⁴³ Thus the title of the novel either suggests California as this primitive, untouched space (a trope that sounds alarms bells all across Pynchon criticism as signifying a salvific, potential utopia), or is critical of such a notion in 1984's America. Or is the Vineland of the novel something altogether more subtle, a zone that could possibly exist *outside* of these particular concerns? The ambiguity of the title allows the novel to wriggle away from committing to either romanticism or cynicism, and this unstable, teetering discourse thus becomes vital to *Vineland*.

I say 'vital' in the truest sense, because it is the confusion and chaos that exists in the larger narrative on the novel that allows Pynchon to dissect and explore the theology of the Sixties at a closer, more individual level. *Vineland* deals with the New Age Movement by breaking down its component parts and holding each one of them up to the light. By doing this, as Wilde has already posited, Pynchon uses the New Age, in both its holistic and individualist incarnations, to explore the shortcomings and the potential truths of the theological system that has formed the backbone of his novels for the last 27 years.

We shall begin the more straightforward aspect of this analysis: the theological shortcomings of the New Age. From what I have established in the introduction to this chapter regarding the synthesis of New Age spiritualism and consumer capitalism, the exemplary passage in this regard is the Bodhi Dharma Pizza parlour. This passage offers us a satire of the health food and spiritual trends of the hippy movement. The restaurant blends the sacred with the profane, mixing tropes of a Buddhist temple with that of a fast food joint. The sacredness of Buddhist dogma co-exists with the hilarity of an ill-

²⁴³ 'Saga of Erik the Red', In Paul Scach, *Icelandic Sagas* (Boston: Twain Publishers, 1984), p.180.

advised pizza franchise, in a fashion that suggests a problem with the transmission between these two elements. Pynchon injects pathos into his descriptions of the restaurant, depicting it as a sacred temple before clashing it with the daft concept of a Buddhist pizza parlour: 'He stood beneath a stained-glass window made in the likeness of an eightfold Pizzic Mandala, in full sunlight a dazzling revelation in scarlet and gold, but at the moment dark, only tweaked now and then by headlights out in the street.' (VL, p. 51)

The promise of a 'revelation' is dashed by the absence of light, a trope often used by Pynchon to suggest a distance from revelation. The only light here is artificial, caused by the cars outside, and the notion of any revelation being drawn from anything that could be 'pizzic' is comical. However, in typical Pynchonian style, this is not a simple satire of a particular quirk in the latter New Age mentality, something more complex is at work here. It is interesting that Pynchon suggest that at *some point* during the day the light hits the window, and it possibly *does* become a 'dazzling revelation'. To explore this further, we must refer to the beginning of the passage, where Zoyd Wheeler first enters the restaurant in search of his daughter Prairie, who is employed there:

Zoyd thought his best bet might be to find an RV park someplace and try to blend in. He reserved a space a few miles out of town up Seventh River under a fake name, praying nobody was listening in on this phone. Then, gingerly, proceeded in the cedar-shake eyesore to Bodhi Dharma Pizza, which he could hear tonight before he saw it. All the occupants of the place were chanting, something that, with vibes of trouble to come, he recognised – not the words, which were in Tibetan, but the tune, with its bone-stirring bass, to a powerful and secret spell against invaders and oppressors, heard in particular a bit later in the year at harvest time, when CAMP helicopters gathered in the sky and North California, like other US pot-growing areas, once again re-joined, operationally speaking, the third world. (VL. p. 49)

In amongst the ludicrous concept of a Buddhist Pizza place, Zoyd manages to grasp at something that alludes to a real spiritual truth. We see in this passage tropes that Pynchon uses throughout his corpus to suggest genuine salvific meaning: community, outsiders, a huddling against oppressive machinations. The mention of a 'spell' suggests that amidst this profane enterprise there is still a scant amount of revelation, the feeling invoked in Zoyd by the chanting almost becoming prophetic. A very real connection to a mystical world outside the oppressive, Reaganite America can be drawn here, a connection that feels immediately absent from this monument of New Age consumerism before him, but perhaps still present somehow.

This passage is interesting in that it shows the slippery interplay between the sacred and profane operates in *Vineland*. While the novel's intention seems to be a savage critique of the consumerist usurpation of the New Age Movement, there exists small moments of salvific material that exist among it. Once again we witness Pynchon's doubling technique of critique and valorisation, being reluctant to empirically deny any salvific content to these "un-serious" moments. Another example of this lies further in the small details of the Bodhi Dharma Pizza passage. The night manager's name - Baba Havabananda – suggests a quaint music-hall catchphrase masquerading as a fake Buddhist guru's name, but Baba is described as 'saintly' (VL, p. 52), and also offers up wise aphorisms that show an insight onto the Californian lifestyle: 'Risking a lifelong career in law enforcement [...] in the service of the ever-dwindling attention span of an ever more infantile population. A sorry spectacle.' (VL, p. 52) Pynchon's relationship between the sacred and the profane becomes muddled at points like this, the ridiculous becoming fonts of wisdom and insight.

Further still, Zuniga's insulting comment that Baba 'sound[s] like Howard Cosell' (VL, p. 52) throws up some interesting references. Cosell was a television sports

commentator, famous for announcing the death of John Lennon during a football game in 1980, and also for the phrase 'the Bronx is Burning', where he allegedly – later scrutiny informed us he never did – said this as a camera panned from a football game over to an image of the Bronx fires of 1977. So here we have a reference that has multiple connotations. One could be an oblique reference to John Lennon, a counter-culture figure whose assassination was lauded as another death-knell for the hippy era. Another could be a reference to a famous phrase never uttered, a false prophet. The roundabout allusion to the Bronx fires reminds us of Pynchon's interest in urban riots ('Journey into the Mind of Watts' rears its head) and the link it has to oppression and resistance that is a common vein across Pynchon's corpus. It could also be linked to Zoyd's warning of 'trouble to come', a shared reference to the social decay of a seventies Bronx and the police oppression of an eighties California.

All these roads of reference further feed into the complex and playful relationship between the New Age and a sense of genuine, spiritual truth, with no steady ground under us, Pynchon leads us down a merry path into a deepening sense of uncertainty of where the sacred could possibly be found within the novel. However, glimmers of salvific material, bearing all the Pynchonian hallmarks of such, peer briefly out of the text among the comical and often savage profanity of the eighties New Age Movement.

These small 'glimmers of light' occur frequently amidst the base and hilarious New Age-isms in *Vineland*. Another passage that shares thematic similarities to the Bodhi Dharma Pizza passage is the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives.

Whereas the Bodhi Dharma Pizza passage takes a satirical swipe at the modern relationship between crass consumerism and New Age philosophical leanings, The Kunoichi Sisterhood passage mirrors the Esalen institute in Big Sur, which I have

mentioned previously in this chapter. This is an explicit comparison by Pynchon, as at the beginning of chapter eight he writes 'Described in *Aggro World* as 'A sort of Esalen institute for lady asskickers.' (VL, p. 107) While this serves as a nice satire on the hippy, self-actualisation outfits such as the Big Sur hippy outfit of Esalen, as before Pynchon endeavours to leave little traces of grace in the passage.

The first of these is the extraneous background given to the site of the Institute. Pynchon states:

Originally, in the days of the missions, built to house Las Hermanas de Nuestra Senora de los Pepineros – one of those ladies' auxiliaries that kept springing up around the Jesuits in seventeenth-century Spain, never recognised by Rome nor even the Society, but persisting with grace and stamina there in California for hundreds of years... (VL, p. 107)

We can see from this passage that before this bazaar of New Age self-help and Japanese popularism, there existed there once a place that is recognisable to a Pynchon scholar as a zone of genuine spiritual retreat, a place that defied any collaboration with large theological organisation and persisted regardless with its spiritual presence ('grace', for instance, is not a word used lightly in Pynchon's work). The sense of resistance against an organised, stable religious core is compounded by the fact that the Jesuits are notably a male dominated order. The name of the order itself, 'The Sisters of Our Lady of the Cucumber Patches', has multiple potential references. It reminds us of the Cucumber Lounge, the location of Zoyd Wheeler's defenstrative spectacle, another example of something once genuine turned into a vapid simulation of its previous form. This profane image could jar with the more serious notion of the sisterhood as some long-gone zone of spiritual retreat, but is brought together at the end of the passage, where the Sisterhood now 'continue to market the world-famous cucumber brandy

bearing their name.' (VL, p. 107) All that remains of the nuns is the brandy, a commodity that serves as just dirty sniggering. All that may have existed of a true, spiritual core was 'put up for rent and disperse[d] to cheaper housing...'

The Kunoichi themselves are somewhat enigmatic. They seem to have been thrust into the consumerist world much like the cucumber nuns, forced selling commercialised aspects of their spirituality for financial gain. However they seem more savvy than the prior occupants of the retreat, maintaining their home and way of life despite them capitalising on it. It seems in this chapter Pynchon's critical eye falls more on the attendants of the SKA.

The activities of the retreat are honed towards the New Age fascination with Orientalism, acting as a Disneyfied Asia,

...offering, eventually, fantasy marathons for devotees of the Orient, group rates on Kiddie Ninja Weekends, help for rejected disciples of Zen ("No bamboo sticks – ever!" promised the ads in *Psychology Today*) and other Eastern methods. (VL, p. 107)

These activities provide a nostalgic base for men who fought in the Pacific Rim or possibly by extension Vietnam, 'Men of a certain age in safari outfits and military haircuts' (VL, p. 107). There is an uneasy brutality at work here, as old soldiers in 'the grip of merciless nostalgia' are drawn to this simulacrum of the world they once did battle in, sexualising those they once fought, arriving at the retreat 'with ogling in mind, expecting some chorus line of Asian dewdrops.' We could be reminded at this juncture of poor old Brigadier Pudding in *Gravity's Rainbow*, embarking on a ritual that sexualises his own experiences at Passchendaele. The Kunoichi Sisterhood, for these men in the grip of war trauma, serves as a potential cathartic zone to sexualise death. This, however, does not actually occur, as the Sisterhood becomes mere theatre, 'Not

only were most of them [the Kunoichi] non-Asian, many were actually black, a-and Mexican too! What went on?' (VL, p. 108)

The incorrect expectations of these old soldiers grant the Kunoichi a dislocation position in Pynchon's satire. The foiled expectation of the titillation of an oriental stage show is met with the Kunoichi sisters as a distant, militaristic and poly-national outfit. Little about the sisters themselves is parody, they seem in the text true practitioners of a particular Buddhist discipline, albeit one they commoditise for income. For Prairie, the retreat seems that in the truest sense, a genuine haven from the relentless and villainous Brock Vond:

As they got closer [to the institute], Prairie saw archways, a bell tower, an interpenetration with the tall lime surfaces of cypresses, pepper trees, a fruit orchard ...nothing looked creepy to her. She was a Californian kid, and she trusted in vegetation. What was creepy, the heart of creep-out, lay back down the road behind her, in, but not limited to, the person, hard and nearly invisible, like quartz, of her pursuer, Brock Vond. (VL, p. 108)

The institute is also a centre of enlightenment to Prairie, as it is here she finds out information about her mother Frenesi, and also embarks on some Zen Buddhism herself. The teachings of the Kunoichi are an interesting part of the passage. Beneath the comical notions of child-friendly ninja training and Karmic cookery, we can identify that Pynchon is engaging with Zen Buddhism on a reverent level. Samuel Thomas in his book *Pynchon and the Political* agrees, highlighting the dual nature of the Kunoichi retreat:

It is a home, a school, a business and stronghold. Indeed, it is a space that disrupts many of the categories that have informed the analysis so far – public and private, visible and invisible, state and underground, military and civilian.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, p. 132.

Like many of the elements in *Vineland*, the retreat does indeed defy a more traditionally Pynchonian splitting between a redemptive and an oppressive zone. While the retreat can exist as this hyperbolic negative image of New Ageism, the sisters themselves are far from it, as Sister Rochelle (the leader of the whole outfit) has 'a sense of precision more usually associated with federal officials than any new-age guru.' The consumerist usurpation of Karma and Karmic doctrine that the Sisterhood cash in reconsidered, 'This is karmic harmony with teeth,' as Thomas states.

For Thomas, the Sisterhood operates as a uniquely 'new' form of resistance in Pynchon's work. Prior to *Vineland* (as we have witnessed in previous chapters) resistant and/or redemptive spaces have been an abstraction, either something defined by its ineffable unreachable centre, or its temporal distance from the modern world. Nostalgia has played a part in the composition of resistant elements, a yearning for something pre-modern, something that defies the cold rationality of a post-enlightenment era. In *Gravity's Rainbow* we see the latter, with Pynchon looking backwards towards an abstract sense of primordial oneness. The former is best expressed in *The Crying of Lot 49*, with its elusive and unobtainable centre. However, with the Kunoichi, Thomas highlights a potential redemptive zone that appears more substantial, more *real*, than anything encountered previously, something that 'provide[s] a strong working model for contemporary resistance culture.'²⁴⁵ He states:

It is a safe place – not some spurious New Age self-help concept but real bricks and mortar with a real, complex history. It operates according to its own code of practice (the Ninjette Oath) and has its own traditions – earned, nurtured and renewed over time. The Kunoichi might not cohere to any sort of revolutionary class position but they certainly offer us something more

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 138.

viable, at least more tangible, than the underground groups discussed in relation to *Lot 49*. Unlike “Inamorati Anonymous,” the basis of the previous chapter, the “withdrawal” that the Kunoichi represent still has a recognisable political valency. They can offer food, shelter, training, security, trust, fellowship and knowledge. There is a kind of utopianism at work here, but specifically a *materialistic* and *immanent* utopianism, that should not be obscured by the more outrageous elements of Pynchon’s imaginings.²⁴⁶

We have seen resistant spaces and communities before in Pynchon’s work, but as Thomas implies, the Sisterhood is the only one that appears *functional*. What distinguishes the Sisterhood from places like The Zone, is its real world solidity. The retreat is not a simulacrum of an idea of resistant space, it actually functions as one. The simulated elements of the retreat are a smokescreen that is required for its survival. Any hints of true meaning and true resistance are kept safely within. Of course, Thomas is not claiming that the Sisterhood is the perfect Pynchonian resistant model, but something that has this property only in a ‘complex, peculiar and limited way.’²⁴⁷ The retreat doesn’t offer a solution, but instead acts as an alternative, an Other, a sanctuary from the State. Perhaps the retreat *is* an insincere simulation of something that came prior, but it holds just enough ‘edge that can be shared in spite of the offence it might cause to the ancestors.’

If the retreat has a political resonance in the novel that extends past Pynchon’s goofing about and silliness, how far does it resonate theologically? We return again to the Pynchonian notion of sacrifice as proportionate to the *legitimacy* of a spiritual practice. The Kunoichi’s haven and lifestyle come at a great cost, the spirituality that the Sisterhood employ seems to be a world away from the quick-fix New Ageism that they

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 138-139.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 139.

peddle a 'spiritual carwash' (VL, p. 112). This manifests mostly in the character of Sister Rochelle, as Thomas writes:

Rochelle is not a hippy idealist, an LSD casualty or a delusional “Tube-freak”. She has a quietly solemnity that comes from years of minimal gain for maximum effort. Her world weary observations show how aware she is of the time, energy, commitment and concentration it takes to keep the Sisterhood alive from one moment to the next.²⁴⁸

Despite the crass, B-movie, Orientalist shtick that Pynchon surrounds the Sisterhood with, it is this 'minimal gain for maximum effort' that furnishes the Kunoichi with some spiritual legitimacy. Sister Rochelle talks about her spiritual practices with a grim practicality, eschewing the more common New Age rhetoric of sudden transcendence, a spiritual enlightenment that can be acquired, consumed and experienced with immediacy. Rochelle seems very different to other shysters and gurus we encounter in *Vineland*, her 'slow hoarseness' (VL, p. 112) and utter seriousness working as a foil to the “wackiness” around her. In a revealing exchange with Prairie, Rochelle offers up a model of spirituality that avoids the crassness and throw-away nonsense that surrounds Pynchon’s New Age imagery, and instead provides us with something that reflects a more sober and reflective spiritual awareness:

“Common sense and hard work’s all it is. Only the first of many Kunoichi disillusionments – right, DL? – is finding that the knowledge won’t come down all at once in any big transcendent moment.”

“But Zen folks, like where I work, say –“

“Oh, that happens. But not around here. Here it’s always out at the margins, using the millimetres and little tenths of a second, you understand, scuffling and scraping for everything we get.”

“So don’t get into it unless you mean it?” (VL, p. 112)

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 139.

Sister Rochelle's depiction of a more legitimate spiritual practice resonates throughout Pynchon's work. Religious enlightenment is sparse, hidden away in strange country, hidden, slippery and transient. *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, is peppered with moments where Pynchon links instances of spiritual clarity with specific and small segments of time. Slothrop's morning view of rain aboard the *Anubis* contains a moment where 'for ten extraordinary seconds there's nothing in his field but simple love for what he's seeing.' (GR, p. 221) Pokler is tormented by fleeting visits from a daughter, his mental image of her depicted in the traditional speed of film frames; 'what would the time scale matter, a 24th of a second or a year.' (GR, p. 422) The pairing of moments of revelation or transcendence (or other 'spiritual phenomena') with timescales measures in *specific* seconds is used all through *Gravity's Rainbow*, from 'John Dillinger, at the end, found a few seconds strange mercy in the movie images that hadn't quite faded from his eyeballs.' (GR, p. 515), to 'For a few seconds, in a particular place, nearly every night somewhere in the World, sound-energy from Outside is shut off' (GR, p. 695) and of course the familiar line about rocket-impact: 'What if it should hit *exactly* – ahh, no – for a split second you'd have to feel the very point, with the terrible mass above, strike the top of the skull...' (GR, p. 7)

A similar 'frame' motif is present in *Vineland*, with the 24fps community, a community of resistance who take their name from the traditional frame-rate of film stock. Frenesi, a part of this group, also is prone to the micro-moments of transcendence: 'Frenesi dreamt of a mysterious people's oneness, drawing together towards the best chance of light, achieved once or twice that she'd seen in the street, in short, timeless burst, all paths, human and projectile, true, the people in a single presence, the police likewise as simple as a moving blade...' (VL, p. 117) But the connection between these brief moments of spiritual awareness could be considered

dubious and perhaps false in the novel, Jean-Luc Goddard's dictum of 'photography is truth. The cinema is truth twenty-four frames per second'²⁴⁹ becomes unstable, the moving picture in *Vineland* becomes another control apparatus, the domain of the Thanatoids and the 'Tube-freaks'. 24fps themselves seem to be at odds with each other about the nature of light, 'light' of course being a common Pynchonian symbol for revelation, redemption and other spiritual motifs. 'Everybody in 24fps has their own ideas about light, and about all they shared was the obsession.' (VL, p. 201) The connection between light and redemption is furthered by Frenesi, who seeks to amass as much light as she can 'liberate from the local power company' (VL, p. 201) Lighting her films becomes an act of banditry, where she is 'Draining off whenever possible the lifeblood of the fascist monster, Central Power itself...' (VL, p. 202) However, this 'liberation' of light is a vampiric act, redemptive light is not acquired but stolen, its source dubious. It does not bring tangible revelation, but merely serves to obscure: 'the creature had not after all been banished, only become, for a while, less visible.' (VL, p. 202)

Revelation in *Gravity's Rainbow* comes in brief but vital moments, in odd places, depicted as if they are stopped frames of film. They are small moments that occur with apparent frequency across the novel. Sister Rochelle telling Prairie of these moments is a reference to their use in prior novels, but there appears to be a notable difference here.

Revelation is thin on the ground for the Sisterhood; their spirituality is a system that yields little in exchange for the sacrifice it requires. The Sisterhood, however, seems more grounded than other resistant communities and theologies we see in *Vineland*, and also other of Pynchon's texts.

²⁴⁹

Jean-Luc Goddard, *Le Petit Soldat*, 1960.

What the Kunoichi have, that is lacking in other potentially resistant/salvific communities such as 24fps, is a sense of permanency. While 24fps embrace the light as this redemptive and the power of revelation, it still appears tenuous; teetering on destruction:

“Film equals sacrifice,” declared Ditzah Pisk.
“You don’t die for no motherfuckin’ shadows,” Sledge replied.
“Long as we have the light,” Frenesi sounding so sure, “long as we’re running that juice in, we’re OK.”
“Oh yeah? They just pull the plug on your ass.” (VL, p. 202)

24fps are in constant danger of annihilation, 'one stupid mistake' (VL, p. 203) away from disaster. The Kunoichi on the other hand appear as a more stable organisation, sacrificing the romanticism of resistance (something 24fps seem to revel in) in exchange for the permanency of a ‘real’ sanctuary against oppression and singularity. In a retrospective chat with DL, Frenesi even negates the power of 24fps as fanciful whimsy:

“Feels like we were running around like little kids with toy weapons, like the camera really was some kind of gun, gave us that kind of power. Shit. How did we lose track like that, about what was real? [...] So what difference did it make? Who’d we save? The minute the guns came out, all that art-of-cinema handjob was over.” (VL, p. 259)

In the world of *Vineland*, these moments of brief revelation and transient transcendence aren’t enough for anything *truly resistant*, they do not carry enough clout for a true revolution against oppressive and secular power. This is where the Kunoichi come into their own; a hybrid of the political and the theological that is both substantial and permanent; and an organisation that has the capability of holding a truly workable theological model that defies the ineffability of the theology that exists in prior

manifestations. The theology that surrounds the Kunoichi is an extension and improvement of these previous forms, what David Cowart refers to as 'continuity and growth.'²⁵⁰

The Kunoichi, in stark contrast to the silliness and crassness of their being, resist the more romantic and immediately available religious options, in favour of a religion of self-sacrifice and discipline. Pynchon uses very little of his 'light' motif during Kunoichi passages, reserving that for the more transient and elusive vibe of 24fps. In fact, the only passage involving 'light' or 'illumination' is when the students of the retreat enter the larder in search of food, and encounter the Variety Loaf – a strange, glowing foodstuff. A debate begins about whether or not it should be consumed, and one student chips in with 'Bio-luminescence is life, [...] and all life is sacred.', whereas another counters with the more matter-of-fact 'Never eat anything that glows.' (VL, p. 190) The party then continue to debate the edible nature of the Variety Loaf, citing esoteric and exotic religious practice in a particular New Age fashion. The glowing loaf is a red herring, a distraction from what truly matters theologically in *Vineland*. 'Prairie had a few seconds' glimpse of how dishearteningly long this might go on, how inconclusive, time-wasting, and unspiritual it would all turn out...' (VL, p. 190)

Prairie's despondent response to the New Ageism going on in this passage could be expanded to a lament for New Ageism across the novel. The silliness of a quick-fix religion is successfully lampooned, and highlights the Kunoichi as something very different to this spiritual trend (perhaps why the military perverts are so confused that the Sisterhood is not the pacific simulation they expected). The religion practised by the Kunoichi Sisterhood is separate, for it is not a spirituality that relies on outward

²⁵⁰ David Cowart. 'Continuity and Growth: *Vineland* by Thomas Pynchon', *The Kenyon Review*, 12/4 (1990), p. 177.

revelation, but instead a Oneness that comes from an interior source. This creates a problematic religious model, however, especially in regards to how spiritualism is treated by Pynchon prior to *Vineland*. The Sisterhood are not given sudden revelation, they are not the agents or the receivers of anything miraculous. David Cowart in his review of *Vineland* states that the miraculous is a necessity for resistance, writing 'the human thirst for the miraculous – and art's gratification of that thirst – is one of the healthiest manifestations of a resistance to universal mechanization.'²⁵¹ But this is not the case with the Kunoichi, their religion is not based around personal transcendence, but instead the spirit of a community, a resistance against outside forces, and the maintenance of a more global sense of morality – that of Zen Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism has a heavy presence across all of *Vineland*, and like the rest of the spiritual content of the novel, it has a twisty and elusive nature. However, it is in Buddhism that we can find the spiritual core of the novel. It is Buddhism (in particular Zen) that provides us with the most distinguishable division between the light-weight (the New Age satire) and the heavy-weight (the Kunoichi) spiritual systems at work in *Vineland*. In W.Y. Evans-Wentz's translation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (to which Robert E Kohn points as a potential source material in his essay *Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49*) dictates that (as Krishna teaches) 'life is a conflict between two opposing forces, good and evil, [...] light and darkness.'²⁵² From this we can derive how Buddhism goes some way to engage with this conflict. It is a world-goal, a holistic world-view, a meta-narrative that the practitioner is a part of. The light-weight spiritualities of the New Age within the novel do not engage with this, they are concerned with the personal, material

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 182.

²⁵² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (Oxford University Press: London, 1965), p. 36.

goals and easy fixes. The Kunoichi on the other hand, seem to have more in common with Evans-Wentz's analysis.

What separates the Sisterhood from the market-place of spiritual pick n' mix that is the New Age, is their tenacious hold and protectiveness over their sense of community. While the New Age focuses on a late-capitalist obsession with the individual, the Kunoichi act as one whole. The protection of this is paramount; Sister Rochelle manages the Kunoichi as a closed system, '...there's the Ninjette Oath you took, clause Eight, you'll recall, section B? "To allow residence to no one who cannot take responsibility for both her input and her output."' (VL, p. 109) This entropic motif also ties into certain Buddhist principles, as Kohn writes: 'Pynchon's shift of emphasis from thermodynamic to information entropy is in part a response to the Tibetan Buddhist belief in the indestructibility of the mind throughout endless reincarnations, a belief that Evans-Wentz argued much earlier was validated by the conservation of energy under the first law of thermodynamics.'²⁵³ So far, the Kunoichi (astride of their kitschy outward portrayal) appear to adhere to traditional Buddhist doctrine.

Evans-Wentz writes that the goal of Tibetan Buddhism is a complete Oneness with everything, a state of absolute unity, something that none of the New Age Buddhist (or other) material ascribes to: often instead providing the opposite, a private, personal sense of physical well-being. This 'Oneness' appears to be analogous to Pynchon's own spiritual model we have seen before:

The Supreme State, the state of at-one-ment, is the supra-mundane state of transcendent equilibrium, wherein negative and positive become undifferentiated, wherein the two opposing charges constituting the atom

²⁵³ Robert E. Kohn, 'Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*', *Religion and Literature*, 35/1, (2003), p. 75.

merge in *primordial unity*, where neither good or evil exists.²⁵⁴ (emphasis added)

This divine unity is expressed, however minimally, in the Kunoichi Sisterhood. Amidst the pseudo-Buddhist surface of the Kunoichi, lies a system familiar to readers of Pynchon, an enclosed system that defies entropy. (What goes in, what comes out) This is perceived as ‘minimal’, however, due to the scarcity of divinity within the sisterhood. The Kunoichi exist on the cusp of acquiring a sense of enlightenment, but Pynchon eschews enlightenment for a more pragmatic desire to persist. These two ‘oppositions’ create a conflict between ephemeral New Ageisms, and a serious Zen-ness. This conflict could be seen as limiting their ‘divine unity’ as they wrestle between practical and spiritual needs. This discourse may prove to be less problematic, however, as we unpack how Pynchon approaches theology from a pragmatic and genuinely resistant angle. It is also referred to previously in Pynchon’s work, most notably the ‘primordial unity’ that forms a large part of the redemptive and nostalgic elements of *Gravity’s Rainbow* that I have discussed in great detail in previous chapters.

Another element that scores deeper the dividing line between the heavy and the light-weight spiritualities in *Vineland* is the sacrifice required to successfully practice the religion. Kohn states that Buddhism teaches ‘dependence on self-exertion alone,’²⁵⁵ and Evans-Wentz’s translation of *The Book of the Great Liberation* states that ‘without mastery of the mental process there can be no realization.’²⁵⁶

This focus on exertion and an arduous path is common in Buddhism, and are perhaps what influences Pynchon the most in his engagement with Buddhism. From what we can derive from *Vineland*, Buddhism has a complex position in Pynchon’s

²⁵⁴ Evans-Wentz, *Great Liberation*, p. 36.

²⁵⁵ Kohn, ‘Seven Buddhist Themes’, p. 74.

²⁵⁶ Evans-Wentz, *Great Liberation*, p. 236.

theology. While Buddhism is the main backbone of *Vineland*, Buddhist themes have been, at least, at the back of Pynchon's mind throughout his career. Robert E Kohn in his essay 'Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's 'The Crying of Lot 49' explores in detail how the early novel negotiates with the imagery and thematic content of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and other aspects of Tibetan Buddhism popularised by Evans-Wentz. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon mentions 'the winds of karma' (*GR*, p. 147), and as Weisenburger points out, this is a substitution for 'The winds of fate.'²⁵⁷ We can take note of this, taking this allusion as a marker for an embryonic interest in Buddhism, as well as a reference to the more casual inclusion of 'karma' as a contemporary American colloquialism, 'In American sixties slang the term "karma" was cheapened to simply mean "luck."²⁵⁸ Casual and throwaway as such a reference might be, combined with Kohn's exhaustive analysis of *Lot 49*, we can chart a thread of interest in Buddhism across the corpus.

Zen, Beat Zen and Outlaw Zen.

We can determine from prior reading of the pre-*Vineland* texts that there is a thread of Buddhist thought in them, but they become more intimately considered in *Vineland*. However, some important points have been refined. Critics such as the above mentioned Kohn have studied Buddhism in Pynchon mostly under a critique of Tibetan Buddhism, whereas in *Vineland*, Zen is the core Buddhist doctrine that Pynchon opens a dialogue with. Zen Buddhism has a strong presence in the themes and concepts put forth in the

²⁵⁷ Weisenburger, *Gravity's Rainbow Companion*, p. 86.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 86.

novel, and *thus* becomes the chief theological model for the text. For a very brief explanation of Zen (at least in the context of its use in twentieth-century America) we can look to Emma McCloy Layman's book *Buddhism in America*.

Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, which seeks direct access to Truth or Reality through 'meditation'. It does not rely on concepts of God or soul or salvation, and denies the necessity of vows or scriptures or rituals.'
'...through the practice of Zen meditation or zazen, the individual seeks not ideas, but direct awareness – the perception of the concrete essence of reality, in all if its "suchness" [...] attainment of the *ultimate* for the Zen Buddhist comes entirely from self-effort (jiriki) rather than from outside power or other-power (tariki).²⁵⁹

Pynchon's movement to Zen from Tibetan beggars explanation. In part, it is a necessity of the other themes in the novel itself. As I have suggested earlier, a considerable amount of *Vineland* reflects on the 'folly' of the New Age Movement, on the popularisation of 'quick-fix' marketplace religious consumption. Out of all the doctrines of Buddhism, it was Zen that was the most keenly adopted by the New Age, from the literature and art scene of the fifties that grew into the 'Beat Zen' movement, to the hippies embracing a philosophy of 'psychedelic Zen' in the sixties, through to the individualism and self-help trend of the eighties and nineties. Pynchon is very much aware of the Americanisation of Zen in the twentieth century (particularly in the California area), and is keen in *Vineland* to explore the duality of this, showing both a consumerist, capitalist appropriation of Zen and simultaneously exploring the real and more vital possibilities that Zen thought may provide a functioning set of serious spiritual ethics in the novel.

Perhaps more mundanely, Zen also assists *Vineland* geographically. The inclusion of a particularly 'Japanese' religion allows him to explore another concern of the novel:

²⁵⁹Emma McCloy Layman, *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), p. 54.

the fetishisation of Japanese culture that took place in America in the seventies and eighties in art, literature and film. The references to Godzilla, the broken dialogue of Japanese characters mirroring the bad dubbing jobs of Japanese B-movies and the general orientalisering of the 'look east' attitude of post-war progressive America all allow Pynchon to engage with how America consumed Japanese culture and also their religion.

Another aspect of Zen that connects to how Pynchon uses Zen as an ethical system, are the concepts of 'jiriki' and 'satori'. As Layman pointed out, jiriki is the gain of enlightenment achieved entirely by the self, as opposed to any divine intervention. This works in opposition to other doctrines such as Shin Buddhism (or more generally, Amidism), where enlightenment becomes a distant possibility outside of divine intervention²⁶⁰ (*tariki*). When considering Pynchon's overall theological model, jiriki allows a critical examination of a personal, ethical theology. The notion of self-work without the yoke of any exterior power also allows Pynchon to align Zen comfortably with more social and political issues, perhaps using Zen as a more concrete religious model for resistance and liberation, specifically, resistance to the kind of self-repression and complicity with power so vividly dramatized in *Vineland*.

'Satori' is another key term in New Age American Zen. Layman describes Zen Buddhism as 'a religion with a unique method of mind-body training whose aim is *satori* (enlightenment) or self-realisation.'²⁶¹ Satori itself is a particularly Japanese notion of enlightenment where 'seeing into one's nature' can occur at any time, an

²⁶⁰ 'The Jodo Shinshu or Shin sect of Buddhism [...] advocate salvation by *tariki* (other power), rather than by *jiriki* (self-power). They argue that the teachings of the sutras are too difficult for most people to understand; that few can hope to attain enlightenment by meditation; and that man's past incarnations have resulted in an accumulation of so much bad karma that only a saint, through his own efforts, could possibly accumulate enough merit in a lifetime to be able to attain nirvana. However, they say, if one has faith in Amida Buddha and repeats the *nembutsu* or invocation [...] he will be saved by the grace of Amida Buddha. After he dies he will be reborn in a "Pure Land" or "Western Paradise" presided over by Amida Buddha, and there he will finally attain nirvana.' (Layman, p. 34)

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 54.

instant awakening that can befall any practitioner. Satori has much in common with the more traditional Buddhist state of enlightenment in that it gives the subject absolute knowledge of themselves and their position in a holistic world-view. What is interesting about satori in regards to *Vineland* is a particular aspect of it that caused Zen to become popular with the beats, the hippies and the New Agers across America.

One of the key proponents of Zen in America was Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (D.T. Suzuki from this point), a Zen teacher and scholar whose work was a direct influence on the beat generation's interest in Zen. In 1953, Allen Ginsberg wrote to Neal Cassidy explaining that he had started to read D.T. Suzuki, explored here in a passage from *How the Swans Came to the Lake* by Rick Fields:

What impressed Ginsberg most in his reading of Suzuki was the description of satori. Five years earlier Ginsberg had heard a voice he took to be William Blake's reciting "Ah! Sunflower" in his Harlem apartment, while outside the blue sky and ancient crumbling buildings seemed alive with "the presence of a vast, immortal, intelligent hand." The vision had left him at once inspired and shaken. Satori, he now thought, "seemed to be the right fitting word for what I had actually experienced so that I got interested in Buddhism."²⁶²

What drew the Beats - and those who succeeded them - to D.T. Suzuki was his emphasis on instantaneous satori, a take on enlightenment that made it more palatable to the West; a mystical transcendence 'from the orient' that can happen to you at any time, not just via the sacrifice and hard work of more traditional Zen Buddhism. According to Layman, Suzuki was adamant in the immediacy of satori: 'According to Suzuki, satori comes upon one abruptly and is a momentary experience. If it is not abrupt and sudden, it is not satori.'²⁶³ Suzuki's mystical take on Zen exploded across the Beat generation,

²⁶² Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p. 210.

²⁶³ Layman, *Buddhism in America*, p. 59.

from Ginsberg's interest in transcendence to Kerouac's expansive and heady *The Scripture of Golden Eternity*, a Zen meditation Kerouac was expressively commanded to compose by his Zen teachers.

Suzuki's influence and popular take on satori extended further into the hippy movement, where his acolytes managed to synergise Zen with drug culture. In *Buddhism in America*, Layman talks about how the pioneers in recreational LSD use adopted Zen tropes:

The psychological literature as well as the literature on Zen abounds in descriptions of the altered states of consciousness experienced under the influence of LSD-25 and other hallucinogenic drugs. Descriptions of these drug-induced states often compare them with the experience of satori or enlightenment which may result from Buddhist meditation. Frequently the opinion is expressed that, under certain circumstances, the LSD experience is a satori experience.²⁶⁴

Suzuki himself was not comfortable with the use of LSD in Zen, warning against 'groups of mystical drug takers'²⁶⁵ in an essay presented at the *Eastern Buddhist* symposium in Japan. But it had become too late, and during the sixties LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs became synonymous with American Buddhism, and satori became synonymous with 'being high'. While Suzuki frowned on the practice, his successors - the likes of Robert Aitken and Alan Watts - were more sympathetic (if not slightly wary) towards the use of drugs in Zen. Soon Zen became the logical next step to drug users, trying to replicate and enhance the experiences they had on LSD, mescaline, peyote et cetera. As Layman points out:

²⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 192-193.

²⁶⁵ Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 250.

Virtually all Zen masters, Tibetan gurus, and teachers of Buddhist meditation of whatever sect in the United States, report that a large percentage of young adults coming as new students for training in meditation have done some experimenting with drugs. Most of this has involved marijuana and the hallucinogens – especially LSD – with very few having been on heroin or other hard drugs. Many wanting to meditate have had a glimpse of rapture or of a spiritual dimension to life through their drug experience, but have recognised it as shallow or transitory and are looking for something deeper and more permanent, divorced from any outside agent.²⁶⁶

So once a generation had dabbled in mind expanding drugs and thus sought a spirituality that replicates it, we have the beginnings of a New Age Zen, a quick-fix where satori can spring upon you at any moment. Zen retreats, like Aitken's 'Koko-an Zendo' (a Hawaiian retreat, interestingly), gained a reputation as 'a good place for tripping,'²⁶⁷ and the Summer of Love sent many drug users knocking at the doors of Zen monasteries. We see Pynchon drawing upon this in Prairie's arrival at the Kunoichi retreat:

"Well you ought to see how many gaga little twits we get up here, 'specially your age group, nothing personal, looking for secret powers on the cheap. Thinking we'll take 'em through the spiritual car wash, soap away all that road dirt, git 'em buffed up all cherry again, come out th' other end everybody all hangin' around the Orange Julius next door go 'Wow!' 's what they think, like we'll keep them awake all weekend, maybe around dawn on Sunday they'll start hallucinating, have a mental adventure they can mistake for improvement in their life, and who knows? Or they get us mixed up with nuns or ballet?" (VL, p. 112)

Sister Rochelle's (a Zen practitioner herself) damnation of the quick-fix mentality appears to reflect Pynchon's critique of Beat Zen and psychedelic Zen, and this particular brand of American (particularly Californian) Buddhism. Prior to this passage, in a section I have quoted before, Pynchon also seems to deny D.T. Suzuki's notion of

²⁶⁶ Layman, *Buddhism in America*, p. 195.

²⁶⁷ Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 252.

immediate satori, in what I believe to be the most scathing and important sentences on Zen in *Vineland*: 'Only the first of many kunoichi disillusionments – right, DL? – is finding that the knowledge won't come down all at once in any big transcendent moment.' (VL, p. 112) With this powerful statement, Rochelle is discarding the very core of (the appropriated) American Zen.

Pynchon's critique of the Americanisation of Zen contains some strong engagements with the social history of the phenomena. The kitchen of the retreat, for instance, acts a rather humorous method of maintaining karmic balance:

“We're notorious for having the worst food in the seminar-providing community. And we're looking at another herd next weekend, and we try different staff combinations, but nothing works. The karmic invariance is, we're paying for high discipline in the Sisterhood with a zoo in the kitchen. Come on, you'll see.” (VL, p. 109)

This concept of a Zen kitchen is not entirely a fabrication, but instead possibility draws implicitly from real examples. *Green's*, 'a highly successful gourmet vegetarian restaurant overlooking San Francisco Bay, [was] staffed by Zen students, many of whom also lived in either Page Street, or Green Gulch.'²⁶⁸ There were many of these establishments, the majority of them within the San Francisco Zen Centre, run by one of D.T. Suzuki's spiritual heirs, Zentatsu Baker-Roshi. In what Fields calls 'signs of trouble'²⁶⁹ the centre had grown immensely by 1983 into a space that contained a farm and a residential site, as well as many successful commercial enterprises such as the Green Gulch Grocery, the Tassajara bakery and Alaya stitchery. Baker-Roshi was

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 362.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 362.

revealed to have a string of affairs with his students, and abandoned his religion to 'live fast and well'²⁷⁰ off the commercial success of the centre.

So while Pynchon explicitly compares the kunoichi retreat to Esalen in *Vineland*, it also seems apparent that he is also referencing the San Francisco Zen Centre (S.F.Z.C.) and other such institutions. The hyped-up commercialisation and the attraction of clueless Zen seekers fits with these eighties developments, as well as the more jarring material showing how different the kunoichi are. This can now be succinctly observed in the karmic invariance of the food. While the kunoichi are doomed to have terrible food in order to obtain this disciplined and hard spiritual existence, the gourmet food of the S.F.Z.C. must come at the cost of a bankrupt spiritual life, corruption and greed. With the vile food, Pynchon is telling us that in 1984, California's karma was at rock bottom, but perhaps there is still some potential salvific material at its core.

By the early eighties Zen in America was indeed in tatters and communities grew disillusioned with both the rampant conservatism of America at the time and the secularisation and commercialisation of the religion. As Fields states, California found itself full of burnt out Zen junkies:

For some Zen students, it now began to seem that they had paid a rather high price for their youthful idealism. They had learned how to sit zazen, they had the security of community, but they had neglected careers and professions. They had not learned how to make their way in the world. They had not grown up. [...] Some students found disturbing but illuminating parallels between Buddhist centres and alcoholic and dysfunctional families...²⁷¹

Fields claims that it was the eighties that saw the dramatic fall of the Beat Zen and Psychedelic Zen movements. With the transgressions of Baker-Roshi as well as other

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 363.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 363.

Zen Buddhist teachers scandalised for affairs with students, institutional Buddhism had finally unravelled by the nineties, after nearly two decades of decline. Fields writes that this 'resulted in a valuable re-examination of the place of Buddhist practice in American society. At the very least, such problems have cut through romantic projections and thrown American Buddhists back on their own meditation cushions.' Disillusionment with Zen was rampant, after what was 'a series of misapprehensions'²⁷² of Eastern religion. Zen had become awash with capitalist enterprise, New Age quick-fixery and (more darkly) sexual abuse.

Pynchon is keenly aware of the profane path Zen took in America. In *Vineland*, DL's sensei (Inoshiro) teaches her the art of the ninja, and the text laments the cheapening of the martial discipline, from warrior to assassin, from samurai to ninja. This passage reflects the misappropriation of Zen in American counter-culture:

From then on she was able to devote herself full time in ninjitsu, including the forbidden steps outside its canons taken - it seemed long ago - by the sensei, through which the original purity of ninja intent had been subverted, made cruel and more worldly, bled of spirit, once eternal techniques now only one-shot and disposable, single and multiple, none with any meaning beyond itself. This was what he felt he had to pass on - not the brave hard-won grace of any warrior, but the cheaper brutality of an assassin. (VL, p. 126-7)

However, there are complexities here beyond a simple comment on the state of Zen in America. The sensei teaches a cheapened and perhaps spiritually bereft form of a more ancient and pure spiritual discipline. This is a common trope we have seen in Pynchon before: the transmission of something with theological value degrading as it traverses through time. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the magic of the Masons becomes mere ritual; the animistic world becomes less responsive over the ages. This is familiar to us,

²⁷² Ibid, p. 367.

and Pynchon is using the same mechanism here. The sensei's teachings are not the wide-eyed naivety of the Beats and the Psychedelics, nor are they are mechanical sanitising and ritualising of the orthodoxy. They are depicted as the tools of a preterite underclass, and the sensei describes this 'Zen without Zen' approach:

This is for all the rest of us down here with the insects, the ones who don't quite get to make warrior, who with two tenths of a second to decide fail to get it right and live with the rest of our lives - it's for us drunks, and sneaks, and people who can't feel enough to kill if they have to... this is our equalizer, our edge - all we have to share. Because we have ancestors and descendants too - our generations... our traditions. (VL, p. 127)

One can assume from this passage that Pynchon is applying his familiar Calvinist framework to his newer Zen material in *Vineland*, suggesting that there is an elect/preterite hierarchy at work in Zen: one serious, enlightening and ancient for those who are 'elect' (or in this case, 'enlightened' warriors), and another for the preterite - earthy, profane, sometimes ridiculous and strictly for those on the periphery, the outlaws of Pynchon's world. The second is the elusive third territory, a new approach to Zen that taps into the traditions of preterition, channelling the “ancestors and descendants” of a hidden preterite history. As McClure claims, this refracted view of Zen ‘is not for spiritual (and social) aristocrats,’ but instead a hidden preterite Zen that ‘extends beyond that of the conventional religious imaginations, accommodating²⁷³ “preterite” traditions disallowed by their otherness.’

This seems to act as a restatement of Pynchon's concern for, and attraction to the preterite, and also functions with the hard-won and sparse Zen of the Kunoichi. Sister Rochelle 'scraping for everything we get' and her statement that enlightenment 'won't come down all at once in any big transcendent moment' (VL, p. 112) suggest that

²⁷³ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 51.

Pynchon adopts a Zen for those who are lost or striving for something at the edge of society. This is Zen that is for the lost, not the quick-fix satori of the Beats or the Psychedelics. This particular form of Zen could be coined 'Outlaw Zen'.

This term “Outlaw Zen” requires some critical examination. Outlawry has been a common trope in Pynchon’s work; preterite and folk on the peripherals of society have agents who engage with the core conflict in the novels, the opposition between oppressor and oppressed, victim and master, orthodox thought versus heterodox possibility. In *Vineland* (and the novels that came after), Pynchon increasingly engages with notions of outlawry, and begins to establish a solid framework for their analysis. This framework appears to owe much to Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm’s own work on outlaws, in particular his book *Bandits*. Hobsbawm depicts bandits²⁷⁴ as a recurring and uniform phenomenon in societies both historically and geographically. What Pynchon appears to be engaging with in Hobsbawm’s work, is in particular the concept of the social bandit, an agent who uses violence (robbery, assassination etc) to become a liberator, avenger or protector of the community out of which he has emerged. Hobsbawm provides this general definition of a social bandit:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, as avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Or outlaws; the difference between bandits and outlaws is explained succinctly by Hobsbawm. Outlawry is the act of existing outside the established law of the territory you are within, while banditry is a wider term, with social, ethical and political connotations. A bandit is mostly always an outlaw, but an outlaw is not always a bandit in Hobsbawm’s terms, if he does not engage with the ethical framework of banditry. However, Pynchon uses ‘outlaw’ to describe what Hobsbawm refers to as ‘bandit’; there seems to be no distinction between the terms.

²⁷⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*. New Ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), p. 20.

Pynchon closely echoes this definition in his introduction to Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction*. In his own definition of what an outlaw is, he states "'but they are all bandits", the rulers cry indignantly, "motivated only by greed", and "we always end up loving these folks." He describes outlaws as knowing the difference between 'theft and restoration,'²⁷⁶ a distinction that Hobsbawm makes as well. The social bandit is an agent of restoration, the 'restoration of the traditional order 'as it should be.'"²⁷⁷ They commit their banditry in an upward trajectory, towards the oppressors of their community. They do not seek out individual goals, but act *en masse* towards the upkeep of a particular way of life, no social bandit has intentions of becoming 'a strong-arm rural bourgeoisie.'²⁷⁸ Such goals do nothing to elicit the sympathy of the peasant community. In a fashion, social bandits are traditionalists at their core, desiring the restoration of some 'real or mythic past'²⁷⁹ instead of social reform or progression. Hobsbawm makes it clear that social banditry is – at its heart - activism, not reformation. These restorative acts are considered by those outside of the community as a 'reaction against what it considers progress.'²⁸⁰ We can see with these general tenants of banditry, a close synergy with Pynchon's own use of outlawry: a condemnation from authority leading a commendation from the peasants (Pynchon uses 'preterite' as Hobsbawm uses 'peasant'), a system of honour and arduous, hard fought ethics, and a faith in the restoration of a mythic utopian space that manifests pre-*Vineland* as primordialism.

There are three essential criteria as put down by Hobsbawm to what can be a social bandit, and what conditions such can arise under. I will briefly explain them now, placing them alongside *Vineland*, ultimately to explore exactly what the first part of the

²⁷⁶ Pynchon, 'Introduction to *Stone Junction*', p. 2.

²⁷⁷ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, p. 29.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 30.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

term Outlaw Zen refers to. The first tenet is the conditions placed upon a community that cause bandits to exist. The community must have an outside influence that is causing the community to change in some way, or causing resentment of the encroaching Other. This could be the introduction of a rival culture, or economic division. This may manifest into 'resistance to the rich, to foreign oppressors, or to other forces destroying the traditional order of things.'²⁸¹ Such opposition has always been a key component of Pynchon's novels. They are texts of opposition, the antagonistic 'They' feature in some way or another in every novel as agents of homogeneity and oppression. The clearest example of this in *Vineland* is the state's anti-drug oppression, a right-wing subdivision and destruction of each possibly redemptive aspect of the Sixties. The preterite in the novel are depicted by those who hold power over them as animals, as Brock Vond says to Frenesi, 'this is how they want you , an animal, a bitch with swollen udders lying the dirt, black-faced, surrendered, reduced to this meat, these smells.' (VL, p. 287) There is much in the way of submission and victimhood in *Vineland*, some a lament, some acerbic. This leads us into the second tenet of banditry.

The second tenet of a bandit is mobility. A peasant cannot take up a bandit's life if they are tied to the responsibility of labour. Labour appears as the biggest restraint on banditry:

Banditry is freedom, but in peasant society few can be free. Most are shackled by the double chains of lordship and labour, the one reinforcing the other. For what makes peasants the victims of authority and coercion is not so much their economic vulnerability – they are indeed as often as not virtually self-sufficient – as their mobility. Their roots are in the land and the homestead, and there they must stay like trees, or rather like sea-anemones or other sessile aquatic animals which settle down after a phase of youthful mobility. [...] The peasant's back

²⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 21-22.

is bent socially, because it must generally be bent in physical labour on his field.²⁸²

In *Vineland*, the immobility of the preterite is not labour, but instead the immobility placed upon America by the Tube. The Tube represents submission, and complete submission to it has deathly consequences; the transformation in the ghostly Thanatoids (I will discuss this further in more detail elsewhere in this chapter). Instead of using labour to keep the peasants busy, the oppressors of *Vineland* use distraction: “...fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it’s what the Tube is for, and though it kills me to say it, it’s what rock and roll is becoming – just another way to claim our attention...” (VL, p. 314) Mobility is ‘won back’ in *Vineland* by the creation of closed systems, of self-sufficiency. This takes dedication and what Hobsbawm calls an unwillingness ‘to accept the meek and passive social role of the subject peasant; the stiff-necked and recalcitrant, the individual rebels.’²⁸³ The mobility of the Zen outlaw is paramount, both in their ability to disappear, or act as a refuge (in the case of the Kunoichi Attentives taking in Prairie). Sister Rochelle’s rule of allowing only ‘residence to no one who cannot take responsibility for both her input and her output’ (VL, p. 109) expresses this integral need for the bandit to be mobile, to rely on nothing that could negate their struggle. What amounts in the novel to a desire to keep a ‘karmic invariance’ going in their disciplined lives, also manifests as a pragmatic desire to remain mobile, and thus to keep their freedom and bandit status.

The third tenet of social banditry is their ethics. The ethical concern of the social bandit is the concern of their community. The morals of the community always tend to override the morals of the state, thus often marking the state as criminal in itself,

²⁸² Ibid, p. 34.

²⁸³ Ibid, pp. 39-40.

making the bandit *noble*, a ‘Robin Hood’ figure that does not always represent ‘proletariat wish-fulfilment,’²⁸⁴ but instead a goodly figure who selflessly aids and protects the community. They avoid needless violence, or at least in their myths, ‘whether or not any real bandit was ever in a position to live consistently up to this moral requirement of his status is [...] very doubtful.’²⁸⁵ In *Vineland*, misplaced violence is dealt with very seriously. DL’s wrongful assassination of Takeshi (in lieu of Brock Vond) is punished by her being bonded to him, the only price for the reversal of her ‘fuck up.’ (VL, p. 154)

The Zen Outlaw engages with the seriousness and difficulty of their karmic compassion, but also with the profanities of the culture around them. Calling this a degradation of their ethical role in *Vineland* would be a superficial fallacy – after all, if the Zen Outlaws are truly Hobsbawmian bandits, then they must reflect the culture and desires of the communities whom they are a part of. They adopt the popularised vision of Zen, assimilating into the crass culture of the preterite Californians. This grants them true bandit status – they are one of the communities they champion, familiar to the preterite as they have cast off the ‘Japanese insular craziness.’ (VL, p. 122) Their adoption of Zen is a restorative act in itself. Zen, as I have suggested, has been morphed, altered and rather maligned by its American appropriators. Outlaw Zen sifts it from the wreckage, and once again puts it to serious use.

One of the core features of this Outlaw Zen is its practicality, its ability to adapt and adjust to the needs of the Outlaw. It is indeed an equalizer, a method of resistance against the Elect and a means to acquire and absorb an outlaw tradition in itself. DL’s sensei is a man with a practical mind-set, shaking off the overt orientalism and

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 52.

romanticism of Zen. After accusing DL of 'seeing too many movies, maybe', (VL, p. 127) he makes her consider the use of her 'powers' in the context in which those deemed Outlaw must fight:

“...Those you will be fighting – those you must resist – they are neither samurai or ninja. They are *sarariman*, incrementalists, who cannot act boldly and feel only contempt for those who can ... only for what I must teach you they have learned respect.' (VL, p. 127)

The word 'sarariman' is a Japanese word that translates to 'salary man', a term (sometimes pejorative) used to describe middle-class office workers, white collar workers who are characterised by their diligence, happiness in their social role and unoriginality and lack of creativity. They act here as a familiar Pynchonian antagonist – people who represent singularity, who are devoid of struggle or any meaningful spirituality. Translated in eighties America, the *sarariman* becomes the yuppie, the archetype of aggressive Reaganism and capitalism. Brock Vond and the drug-busters in *Vineland* could also be deemed *sarariman*.

The sensei keenly understands the dialogue of resistance. The mystical aspect of Zen adopted by the Beats and the Hippies is no use for resistance: that has been taken and repackaged by the *sarariman* in the eighties in consumerist market-place religion. The only weapon left for any meaningful resistance in the Zen artillery is the more earthy and violent components. The sensei teaches DL that violence is all they understand so violence is what we will receive. This takes on a violent edge, a method of resistance that involves invoking fear in those who are attacking, and thus – engaging with that they understand – gaining their respect, or even just their attention.

So while we see a thread running between these Outlaw Zen practitioners and Pynchon's other meditations on terrorism in general where one feeds smoothly into the

other, we are now due to return to how *Vineland* clarifies and explores Outlaw Zen as a legitimate spiritual system. Its practitioners seem to be exclusively preterite, and thus Pynchon allows them to have a hidden, parallel preterite history and tradition to support their spiritual needs.

DL's sensei is distinctly preterite, somewhat of a tragic figure, but distinctly 'outlaw'. His identity shifts from that of a legitimate Zen master to that of pastiche of Japanese B-movie culture. His wisdom and understanding of his place among 'outlaws' grants him more legitimacy as a Zen master (at least in the context of the novel) than the popularist D.T. Suzuki or the downright sleazy Baker-Roshi, despite his placing of 'one hand on DL's leg while using the other hand to chain-smoke' (VL, p. 122). His name is a reference to Inoshiro Honda, the director of *Godzilla* and many other B-movie Japanese monster films²⁸⁶, that Pynchon is so fond of including in *Vineland*. Existing in this mediating zone between holy man and popular whimsy, DL muses on his preterite, outlaw existence, where he must 'live penitent, earthbound, down here in the ensnarling city.' (VL, p. 123)

This assumption of Inoshiro under 'time pressure so heavy' (VL, p. 123) by DL places him firmly in the position of the Outlaw, and his methodology (much like the bizarre outlaw teachers in Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction*) seems utterly unorthodox. While the character embraces the crass clichés of the contemporary American fascination with Japanese culture of the eighties (which were recycled much later by Tarantino in his *Kill Bill* films), he rejects the more romanticised Zen clichés that Pynchon sees as much more insidious:

²⁸⁶ This is reinforced further by the fact that Inoshiro was a westernised, miscredited version of the director's name, whose name was actually Ishiro Honda.

In the *more traditional stories*, a few which DL would come to hear before she left Japan, the apprenticeship is harsh and long, someplace scenic up the mountains where the student is put to work at menial outdoor tasks, learning patience and obedience, without which she can learn nothing else, and this alone, *in some stories*, takes years. What DL got from Inoshiro Sensei was more like the modernized crash course. (VL, p. 123, emphasis added.)

The repetition of ‘stories’ in this passage shows them as exactly that. They are not the stories of some form of ‘true Zen’ from which the sensei has been exiled from, but tales that belong to the romantic vision of Zen: the placid gurus that so enticed Ginsberg, Kerouac and Snyder into Buddhism and the immaculate meditation gardens of Esalen and the S.F.Z.C. There is no purpose for the bucolic charms and *symbols* of that breed of Zen here; these are the earthy practices of Outlaw Zen. Inoshiro himself professes to reject this image: ‘One of my major karmic missions this time around is to get outside of Japanese craziness²⁸⁷, be international *assukikaa*, *ne*? Come on,’ announced the sensei, ‘we’re going dancing!’ (VL, p. 122) The off-hand announcement that Inoshiro wants to be (an amusing cod-Japanese rendering of) an ‘asskicker’ references Pynchon’s meditation on ‘The Badass’ in ‘Is it Okay to Be a Luddite?’, and *thus* situates Inoshiro as a preterite hero.

There is a tendency in *Vineland* for Pynchon to combine his sympathy for the preterite with Zen Buddhism. One such case is Takeshi’s ‘karmic re-balancing’, where he journeys to the kunoichi retreat to cure himself of the Vibrating Palm that DL mistakenly places upon him. When Takeshi arrives at the retreat, he is placed into the Puncutron Machine²⁸⁸, an exaggerated version of a New Age pseudo-scientific medical

²⁸⁷ This is a reference to D.T. Suzuki (and his followers), whose work was distinctly nationalist, lauding Zen as something particularly Japanese. Pynchon is subverting this, allowing Zen to break free of its roots and be transplanted freely and anarchically into American culture.

²⁸⁸ We can see another example of an Eastern-themed machine working against Western Orthodoxy in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: ‘Old Kenosho the loony radarman who’s always brewing up a batch of that sake back in the transmitter room, in a still he’s hooked up to a magnetron tube in some fiendish-Nip way that defies Western science.’ (GR, p. 691)

device whose name is a compound of acupuncture, an eastern medical practice made popular among New Age Americans, and the -o'tron suffix; a common trope in cod science fiction of the era. The machine itself is modelled on psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich's orgone energy accumulator, a device that measured 'orgones', a supposed massless, anti-entropic omnipresent energy that existed with living matter, and had resonances with Buddhist and eastern notions of chi and karmic balance. Reich himself believed that orgones were responsible for cancer in humans, and the machine was used as a curative. Proponents of the machine later adopted it for New Age purposes, most relevantly for the reparation of chi energy, and it was most famously used by William Burroughs.

There are key similarities between the Puncutron Machine and the orgone energy accumulator that secure it as a solid reference point. The Puncutron Machine is depicted as an 'outlaw' device, used by fringe elements, constantly one step ahead of officially sanctioned health bodies:

One of the many therapeutic devices sold freely in California at the time, the Puncutron, though not encouraging for many patients to look at, has in the health community its share of intense loyalists. Detractors included the ever-vigilant FDA, one step ahead of whom the Puncutron's producers had so far just managed to keep. (VL, p. 163-4)

It was the FDA also who sealed the fate of the use of the orgone energy accumulator, as depicted in an article by Mary Bellis:

In 1954, the FDA issued a complaint for an injunction against Reich, charging that he had violated the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act by delivering misbranded and adulterated devices in interstate commerce and by making false and misleading claims. The FDA called the accumulators a sham and orgone-energy non-existent. A judge issued an injunction that

ordered all accumulators rented or owned by Reich and those working with him destroyed and all labelling referring to orgone-energy destroyed.²⁸⁹

Of course this did not stop Wilhelm Reich, who (and alongside other avid users of the machine) was arrested for still using the devices. Reich later died in prison in 1957, before ordering that the last orgone energy accumulators be sealed away for fifties years, until the world was ready to use them again. Pynchon's resurrection of this peculiar machine suggests that he holds some affection for Reich and as the Puncutron Machine obtains an outlaw persona, so does Reich's story. The Puncutron as well as the orgone energy accumulator provides us with a synergy to the heterodox technologies of *Against the Day*, a machine that has spiritual properties that extend beyond a singular scientific view into strange and esoteric territories. It functions in a similar fashion to Merle Rideout's Integroscope, being a machine with salvific, heterodox possibility that becomes anathema to an orthodox world-view.

While a New Age device, the Puncutron is treated differently to the New Age components that Pynchon frequently lampoons in *Vineland*. The key difference in this context is sacrifice and devotion. While a lot of Pynchon's distrust of the New Age stems from its collaboration with crass consumerism and the scandals and corruption that grew in Zen communities in the seventies and eighties, the Puncutron Machine references a story that contains true sacrifice. Wilhelm Reich was not a conscious fraud; he went to prison and eventually died for the legitimacy of the orgone energy accumulator. He could be considered an outlaw, perhaps, an individual who had a strong belief in something that existed outside of orthodoxy, an alternative that resisted the status quo. Such properties, combined with a sizeable amount of devotion and self-

²⁸⁹ Mary Bellis, 'Willhelm Reich and the Orgone Accumulator', *About.com*, last accessed 26 September 2013, <<http://inventors.about.com>>.

sacrifice, are universally attractive to Pynchon and key elements to his politics, both theologically and generally.

With this in mind, we can see how Pynchon adds further to the mythology of Reich's machine in the Puncutron Machine episode. As well as being linked to the machine (B-movie style, as 'they would lie hooked up side by side like actors in a brain-transplant movie' (VL, p. 165)) by electrodes, Takeshi is asked to choose a tape to listen to in order to help the procedure along:

She [the Ninjette Puncutron Technician] handed Takeshi a ten-page menu of audiotapes, from among which he was supposed to choose something to listen to during his Puncutron session. There were hundreds of selections, each good no doubt for its own set of bodily reactions... Would *The All Regimental Bagpipes Play Prime Time Favourites* get him through better or worse than *Taiwanese Healthy Brain Aerobics*? Some choices! As he went down the list, the possibility emerging that far from having been scientifically or even carefully selected, these tapes had all been snatched pretty much at random out of the bargain cassette bins at a Thriftmart in one of the more out-of-the-way locations, and indeed, given the skills ninja were famous for, might not even have been paid for at the checkout... (VL, p. 164)

Bestowed with a forgotten preterite identity the comedic tapes now become talismanic, and the Puncutron itself (much like the orgone energy accumulator) becomes a machine for the preterite, a hidden machine for the outlaw. It is this aspect of the Puncutron that Pynchon demands the seriousness from. While embedded heavily in Zen, it almost functions outside of that. It is not the Zen and pseudo-science that cures Takeshi, it is the genuine connection taking form between him and DL that matters. 'They realized that they were being, somehow, tuned to each other. Could be brain waves, could be chi, maybe good old ESP.' (VL, p. 165)

It is the Puncutron Machine that leads Takeshi to starting up his Karmic Readjustment business, and in turn opens up a dialogue between Pynchon and Zen regarding one of the most important theological elements of *Vineland*: karma.

At the end of the Puncutron episode, Sister Rochelle tells Takeshi an alternative tale of the traditional Abrahamic garden of Eden myth, where ‘morality’ itself is the fruit of the forbidden tree:

“This is important, so listen up. It takes place in the Garden of Eden. Back then, long ago, there were no men at all. Paradise was female. Eve and her sister, Lilith, were alone in the Garden. A character named Adam was put into the story later, to help make men look more legitimate, but in fact the first man was not Adam – it was the Serpent.”

“I like this story,” said Takeshi, snuggling into his pillow.

“It was sleazy, slippery man,” Rochelle continued, “who invented ‘good’ and ‘evil’, where before women had been content to just be. In among the other confidence games they were running on women at the time, men also convinced us that we were the natural administrators of this thing ‘morality’ they’d just invented. They dragged us all down into this wreck they’d made of creation, all subdivided and labelled, handed us the keys to the church, and headed off towards the dance halls and the honky-tonk saloons.” (VL, p. 166)

The Serpent in Sister Rochelle’s tale can be extrapolated to represent most of the male characters in *Vineland*, from Brock Vond’s corruption of Frenesi, to Takeshi’s comic sleaziness with DL and the other Kunoichi. The concept of the masculine representing the oppressive and the damaging is not unique to *Vineland*, as in *Gravity’s Rainbow* prior to this, the Rocket becomes gendered, a split between the destructive power of the vessel itself (the masculine) and the supine earth that is its target (the feminine). Alan Wilde agrees, claiming that ‘much in *Vineland* suggests that men are the villains of all psychic and political wars,’²⁹⁰ and that in the novel Brock Vond’s character is the continuation of this gendered opposition: ‘Brock is, among other things,

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Alan Wilde, ‘Love and Death in and around *Vineland*, U.S.A’, p. 169.

the emblem of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s "masculine technologies" as well as of the treacherous System "They" represent in *Vineland*.²⁹¹

However, this notion also extends beyond a discourse with gender, and reaches further into Pynchon's dialogue with morality. We have seen in prior chapters that Pynchon sees more value in a holistic approach to the world, a morality that invests in connectivity, interdependence. This salvific connection to individuals and communities is threatened when the world is scaled down, 'all subdivided and labelled.' (VL, p. 166) This phrase bears a similarity to a section of *Gravity's Rainbow*:

It is not death that separates these incarnations, but paper: paper specialties, paper routines. The War, the Empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have engineered, ein Volk ein Fuhrer – it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity... (GR, pp. 130-1)

Sub-division and analysis is common concept in *Gravity's Rainbow*, usually shown in a negative manner, and linked to the rigid and oppressive ordering systems that Pynchon deploys as his antagonists. The *Rucksichtslos*, the toilet ship, is 'a triumph of the German mania for subdividing.' (GR, p. 448) Blicero offers up 'Modern Analysis' (GR, p. 722) as a new term for original sin. The binary sorting of good and evil becomes an imposition in itself, dividing and isolating everything into categorical positions, uprooting them from their context and tearing them away from any possible interconnectivity. The folk-consciousness that 'The War' so vehemently denies emerges in the discourse of *Vineland*, and thus Pynchon must investigate an alternative moral system, one that does not focus on analysis and sub-division.

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 167.

Such an alternative must align with Pynchon's holistic view of the world, this notion of 'Oneness' that is being refined across his work. Pynchon finds this alternative in the concept of karma, notably derived from the Zen traditions. Pynchon has discussed karma and Zen before *Vineland*. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, as I have already stated, karma exists as a relatively diffuse term for 'fate'. However, there are passages where Zen makes an early appearance. In Peenemunde, Pokler and Mondaugen encounter two scientists who also double for mystics. The first, Dr Wahmke, seems to represent an alchemist or hermeticist, and the second, Fahringer, is depicted as a Zen practitioner. Fahringer is a Zen archer, who ventures 'out in the pine woods at Peenemunde with his Zen bow and roll of pressed straw to practice breathing, draw and loosing, over and over.' (GR, p. 404) This is a reference to German Eugen Herrigel, a Zen Archery teacher who published *Zen in the Art of Archery* in 1953. Herrigel was linked to the Nazi party and disallowed from teaching post-war, and must have appealed to Pynchon's attraction to merging Nazism and mysticism in the *Gravity's Rainbow* era. Herrigel was untrained in Zen, often discredited by others, but it seems Pynchon was aware of his work. When discussing a holistic approach to the bow itself, Herrigel writes:

Is it "I" who draws the bow, or is it the bow that draws me into the state of highest tension? Do "I" hit the goal, or does the goal hit me? Is "It" spiritual when seen by the eyes of the body, and corporeal when seen by the eyes of the spirit - or both or neither? Bow, arrow, goal and ego, all melt into one another, so that I can no longer separate them. And even the need to separate has gone. For as soon as I take the bow and shoot, everything becomes so clear and straightforward and so ridiculously simple. . . .²⁹²

Fahringer's holistic approach to the Rocket is a perverse rendition of Herrigel. 'It was necessary in some way to become one with Rocket, trajectory, and target— 'not to -will

²⁹²Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, <www.ideologic.org>, p. 47.

it, but to surrender, to step out of the role of firer. The act is undivided. You are both aggressor and victim, rocket and parabolic path and . . .' (*GR*, p. 404) Fahringer's Zen is perversion in the eyes of Pynchon. He is using his Zen arts to create a symbol of death. There is further irony here as it is soon revealed that Fahringer 'couldn't bring himself to kill' (*GR*, p. 454). He sees the *Atman*, the Buddhist self, as 'a genuinely Aryan verb' and sees the engineering problems of the rocket as a koan²⁹³, a Zen puzzle that 'could lead him to some moment of light...' What we can see, however, is the seed of Pynchon employing Zen as a possible salvific path. Fahringer, possibly through his practicing of Zen, appears to break free of this sub-division of morality, free from an aggressive system of guilt: 'Was Peenemunde his mountain, his cell and fasting? Has *he* found his way free of guilt, fashionable guilt?' (*GR*, p. 454) Once again, pre-*Vineland*, we see this romanticised image of the mountain, the retreat of Inoshiro the Zen master. Fahringer's status as preterite seems fairly clear; his philosophy is that of the Other, abhorred by the oppressors, and it ultimately leads to his apprehension by the SS, his 'lab coat a flag of surrender'. (*GR*, p. 454)

In the seventeen year gap between the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland* Pynchon appeared to have focused and expanded upon this notion of Zen as viable moral alternative to this orthodox system of penance, Calvinism and guilt. However, this isn't a simple like-for-like replacement of morality, a usurpation of a

²⁹³ This is one of two references to koans in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The second occurs on page 541 as Sir Stephen is in conversation with Pirate about informers:

"The worst part's the shame," Sir Stephen tells him. "Getting through that. Then your next step—well, I talk like an old hand, but that's really only as far as I've come, up through the shame. At the moment I'm involved with the 'Nature of Freedom' drill you know, wondering if any action of mine is truly my own, or if I always do only what They want me to do . . . regardless of what I believe, you see... I've been given the old Radio-Control-Implanted-In-The-Head-At-Birth problem to mull over—as a kind of koan, I suppose. It's driving me really, clinically insane. I rather imagine that's the whole point of it. And who knows what comes next? Good God. I don't find out, of course, till I break through this one.... I don't mean to discourage you so soon—" (*GR*, p. 541)

system that damns and passes over the preterite for a system that saves and favours them. The Zen material is depicted as medicinal, a cure for the damage which an orthodox moral system has brought to the world. The term used and repeated across the novel is “adjustment”, Karmic adjustment in particular. From its throwaway roots in *Gravity’s Rainbow* where it was regarded as a replacement term for a broad concept of fate and chance, karma has grown in *Vineland* into a solidly functional moral alternative. With the introduction of Buddhism and ‘Outlaw Zen’, Pynchon’s adoration of the preterite and the whole heterodoxical world of the preterite now a resistant theology with a viability and completeness that we have not previously encountered.

Karma must be adjusted because the orthodox moral system of analysis and division has unbalanced it. It is less of an alternative, but more like triage for the damage done to preterite. When Takeshi discovers he is suffering from the Vibrating Palm placed upon him by DL, he imagines his karma unbalanced, his chi flow 'in turbulence – blocked, darkly reversed, stained, lost – slowly destroying his insides.' (VL, p. 157) Takeshi’s initial terror at this appears manifest at first in a more orthodox interpretation of sin, a sinful life now taking its toll on his body: “My own sleaziness – has done me in!” It was too late even for remorse over the years squandered in barely maintaining what he saw now as a foolish, emotionally diseased life.' (VL, p. 158) This at first comes across as slightly puritanical, a world of ‘sleaze’ and erotic pleasure being shorthand for sin and self-destructiveness. This scene can be taken as a macrocosmic metaphor for Pynchon’s critique of Western morality. The doctor tells Takeshi he is suffering from 'trauma, only - much slower' (VL, p. 157). This unseen trauma slowly and silently destroying his body is synonymous with the trauma associated with the collapse of the sixties utopian ideal, and the slow, deathly return of totalitarianism, oppression and orthodoxy. This larger trauma manifests itself in many ways in *Vineland*, from the

capitalistic misappropriation of hippy idealism that is the New Age, to the ghosts this trauma has created: the Thanatoids. We will come to how karma and the Thanatoids function later in this chapter.

The initial tone, however, diminishes and shifts focus, as Takeshi's story continues. Takeshi's current state of mind in this passage charts the beginnings of a transition between a system of sin and a replacement system of karma that not only adheres to his character arc but to the wider moral arc of the novel itself. In this passage we see familiar Pynchonian tropes from prior works, notably the erotic fascination with death, the close relationship of Thanatos and Eros. Takeshi, while contemplating the deathly consequences of his predilection for the erotic, cannot help but fantasise about his sexual encounter with the very woman who 'killed' him. We are reminded yet again of Brigadier Pudding in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but the poles are reversed. Pudding, guilty and tormented by his remembrance of death, seeks a destructive solace in the erotic. Takeshi, a slave to his erotic desires, now becomes fascinated with the thanatotic. DL, whose deadly coupling with him he repeatedly reminiscences upon, becomes his Katje, his own angel of death.

But unlike Pudding, Pynchon allows Takeshi to break free of the guilt, allows him to be cured and thus redeemed. Pudding dies powerless by the hand of a moral system that incarcerates him in a guiltiness of their own design, while Takeshi *finds a cure*. It emerges it is not his sleaziness *per se* that is causing this 'strange, corrosive energy' (VL, p. 156), but instead perhaps the moral system of the oppressors that opposes the 'fashionable guilt' on people. The Puncutron does indeed get his 'chi back flowing the right way' (VL, p. 163), but Takeshi does not curb his sleazy mannerisms, as he flirts with the Puncutron technician, calling the machine 'Kind of – erotic, isn't it, Toots?' (VL, p. 164). Takeshi is saved from his fate not by ridding himself of the old evils of the

old system, but instead by embracing the systems and the heterodoxial methods of salvation of the preterite.

After his apparent cure in the Puncutron (arguably aided more by his meeting of DL, than the machine itself), Takeshi embarks on what DL calls his 'karmic readjustment hustle' (VL, p. 178). He seeks to go into business selling Eastern notions of karma to those who have been wronged by the Western system, those who (succumbing to the fate he avoided) have fallen foul of this trauma, the Western obsession with analysis and sub-division. In a discussion with one of these victims, a Thanatoid named Ortho Bob, Takeshi explains his 'business model':

In traditional karmic adjustment, he [Takeshi] went on, sometimes it had taken centuries. Death was the driving pulse – everything had moved so slowly as the cycle of birth and death, but this proved to be too slow for enough people to begin, eventually, to provide a market niche. There arose a system of deferment, of borrowing against karmic futures. Death, in modern Karmic Adjustment, got removed from the process. (VL, p. 174-5)

The term 'adjustment' is knowingly reminiscent of 'legal adjustment', the settling of a legal or economic dispute to an agreeable state, and thus Takeshi can be initially figured as a businessman, another slimy capitalist appropriating eastern theology for exploitative financial gain. However, Pynchon himself, in his 1997 introduction to Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction*, later refers back to the concept, situating it explicitly as a component of his beloved preterite outlaws:

[We have] long known the difference between theft and restoration, we understand the terms of the deal whereby outlaws, as agents of the poor, being more skilled and knowledgeable in the arts of *karmic readjustment*, may charge no more than an agent's fee, small enough to be acceptable to their clients, ample enough to cover the risks that they have to take, and we always end up loving these folks... (Stone junction Introduction)

The synthesis of Eastern theology and profane, seemingly-shallow Americanisms does not (as we have seen) immediately denote a lack of value. As with *Outlaw Zen* (and I would say that karmic readjustment is the karmic wing of *Outlaw Zen*), it appears to have a seriousness to Pynchon, mainly due to its solid function a redemptive model, and – more importantly – its usefulness to the preterite cause. While Takeshi's plan may indeed be just a 'hustle', it represents theological exploration into mass trauma, and potential recovery from such trauma.

The karma of *Vineland* is set slightly apart from the more traditional eastern notions of karma, in that it is integrated with the seemingly profane world that the preterite inhabit. Pynchon imbues it with a flavour of its own, so that it becomes an almost 'grass-roots' moral system as opposed to larger, monolithic orthodoxy. This is not an anarchical freedom, but the freedom to self-govern, to self-moralise, something that Pynchon sees as arduous and (thus) important. The theologies Pynchon heavily critiques - particularly Calvinism - function by what Ernst Bloch refers to as 'the Age of the Father,'²⁹⁴ an infantile religious stage where laws are dictated, and humanity are child-like and submit to hierarchical structures. Brock Vond subverts this notion by referring to the hippies as children, with what Wilde calls their 'shallowness, irresponsibility, [their] fears, [their] obsessive avoidance of death...' ²⁹⁵

the long-haired bodies, men who had grown feminine, women who had become small children, flurries of long naked limbs, little girls naked under boyfriend's fringe jackets, eyes turned down, away, never meeting those of their questioners, boys with hair over their shoulders, hair that kept getting in their eyes... the sort of mild herd creatures who belonged, who'd feel, let's face it, much more comfortable, behind fences. Children longing for discipline. (VL, p. 269)

²⁹⁴ Ernst Bloch, 'On the Original History of the Third Reich', *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 22.

²⁹⁵ Wilde, 'Love and Death', p. 171.

This passage cannot of course be divorced from the context; Vond is an agent of 'They', the degradation of the feminine to that of a victim is cut from the heart of Pynchon's 'oppressors', as is the reduction of the feminine (much like Blicero and Katje) to simple childhood. Alan Wilde sees this passage as an authorial voice, a critique by Pynchon of the hippy culture, where Brock Vond 'shrewdly recognises'²⁹⁶ the flaws. Wilde theorises that these moments of dark contemplation of the sixties act as a 'not only critical but acerbic' counterpoint to the more bucolic and nostalgic sections when Pynchon rhapsodises about the utopian qualities of the decade. Wilde states that this juxtaposition highlights a betrayal, a loss that mediates between the blissful era of peace and love and the nightmarish, claustrophobic and Orwellian world that the characters in *Vineland* inhabit in 1984:

The betrayal of the variously rendered ideal of simplicity and wholeness his fiction constantly returns to and that *Vineland* intermittently locates in the decade of light and love. More is at stake, however, than complex reactions to a complex period. In problematizing all the decades longings, Pynchon simultaneously problematizes his own.²⁹⁷

Wilde is correct, and *Vineland* is a novel in which the sixties is in constant discord with itself, existing as both an era of promise and an era of shallowness. However, by problematizing his 'own longings' for some avenue of transcendence, Pynchon allows this notion of Takeshi as a karma spirituals to flourish. By condemning the hippies, Pynchon *thus* disassociated with them, positioning himself more towards his increasingly more defined 'Outlaw' archetype as a salvific figure. The child-like dreamscape of the hippies is instead keenly replaced by arduous theological rigour, and an inward self-discipline that rejects the fetishisation of outward authority that the

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 171.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 172.

hippies, in their embracing of their status as ‘victims’, allow themselves to fall for in *Vineland*.

Takeshi’s karmic enterprise seeks (at its core) to repair the damage that the hippy counter-culture did itself, by allowing itself to be brutally transformed into a ‘feminised’ victim of the oppressors. This damage is expressed in *Vineland* by the Thanatoids, a ontologically precarious community of ghost-like people held in thrall by the Tube, ‘traumatized by television and possibly by memories of the sixties.’²⁹⁸ The Tube itself is a complex entity in the novel, one with many signifiers that have been explored by other critics like Wilde, José Liste Noya and Hannah Mockel-Rike in greater detail than I will here. It is sufficient at this point to state that the Tube represents in this context a placating device, a Faustian contact with the oppressive powers that turned the potentially liberating sixties into docile and passive entities. This is explicit in an exchange between Isaiah and Zoyd:

“Whole problem ‘th you folks’ generation,” Isaiah opined, “nothing personal, is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it – but you sure didn’t understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th’ Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars – it was way too cheap...” (VL, p. 373)

The Thanatoids, as consumers of the medium which stands as totemic of the fall of the sixties utopian dream, also become resonant ‘after-images’ of those traumatised by the same loss. Hannah Mockel-Rike in her essay ‘Media and Memory in Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland*’ identifies the Thanatoids as ‘belonging to the group of “preterite”, the losers and victims whose forgotten or lost histories Pynchon is concerned with in all of his novels.’ Yet there is something different that defines the Thanatoids more

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 171.

specifically. While they 'preserve a marginal cultural knowledge of folklore,'²⁹⁹ their culture does not seem to key into the pluralistic and heterodox world more familiar to preterite communities across the corpus. There is no salvation here, the Thanatoids have more in common with the forlorn, ghostly figures passing through London in the opening to *Gravity's Rainbow*, and less with the more dynamic, outlaw communities more familiar to later Pynchon. Their culture is that of the mass culture, homogeneous, reflected by Pynchon's incessant intrusion of mass culture and entertainment (documented and labelled by year) in the texts. As Mockel-Reike claims:

They [Thanatoids] are actually media constructions, quoting cartoons, zombie or vampire movies, like the other characters in the novel. Their relationship to cultural memory, however, remains ambivalent. On the one hand, they use the medium of TV to compensate for and supersede their traumatic memories which they are incapable of forgetting.³⁰⁰

The referral to the nature of the Thanatoids brings karma back into focus. One of their defining features is their fear of death, of being ghosts (despite living in the aptly named Shade Creek) – 'that word – around here it's a no-no!' (VL, p. 173), an integral part of the karmic cycle that Takeshi cynically claims he can bypass. In karmic terms, the Thanatoids are trapped in a cycle, so keenly terrified of death and also eaten up with a desire for vengeance against those who did them wrong (of which there are many, but they are almost always 'They'). Takeshi explains the property of a Thanatoid the best here:

They were victims, he explained, of karmic imbalances – unanswered blows, unredeemed suffering, escapes by the guilty – anything that frustrated their daily expeditions on into the interior of Death, with Shade Creek a psychic jumping-off town – behind it, unrolling, regions unmapped,

²⁹⁹ Hannah Mockel-Reike, 'Media and Memory in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*.' *American Studies*, 43/1 (1998), pp. 51-74, p. 63.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 63.

dwelt in by these transient souls on constant turnover, not living but persisting, on the skimpiest of hopes. (VL, p. 173)

In a Zen sense, the Thanatoids could be stricken with what is referred to as *duhka*, dis-ease, a sense of dissatisfaction. Simon James in his book *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics* states that *duhka* 'could be the realization that even the best of times cannot last, or could be a vague feeling that there is something lacking in life...' Both of these symptoms could be extrapolated to be the symptoms not just of the Thanatoids, but the crux of *Vineland* as a whole. James restates the traditional Buddhist notion that 'life is suffering',³⁰¹ a disease that acts as a painful journey towards Enlightenment, as taught by Gautama Buddha as the Four Noble Truths:

Suffering is inherent in life.
Suffering is caused by craving.
Craving and hence suffering can be destroyed.
The Holy Eightfold Path is the course leading to this.³⁰²

In an initial karmic diagnosis of the Thanatoids, it is clear that they are trapped in this *duhka*, unwilling to pass on through both a listless ache of vengeance against those who placed this dis-ease upon them, and an overwhelming (and particularly western) terror of death. Despite Takeshi's insistence that death is no longer a necessity for karmic imbalance (unless you 'go for the reincarnation option!' (VL, p. 175)), death is an integral part of the karmic cycle. It seems it is the Thanatoid avoidance of death that is the cause of their suffering, at least in the traditional Buddhist sense.

Takeshi is of course lying in his claims that karma can be 'fixed' without participating in death, it is all part of the hustle: 'They don't want to do it – so we'll do it

³⁰¹ Simon James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 5.

³⁰² Ibid, p. 6.

for them! Dive right down into it! Down into all that – waste-pit of time! We know its time lost forever – but they don't!' (VL, p. 173) This statement by Takeshi solidifies both the irreversibility of time, and the entropic trajectory of the Thanatoids. This reference to 'waste' also reminds us of a Benjaminian (see chapter one) interpretation on preterite history – an unimaginably vast, unsorted, uncatalogued lost past. The reference to 'pit' also hearks back to preterite material in *Gravity's Rainbow*; the coal-tar 'growing older, blacker, deeper, in layers of perpetual night' (GR, p. 133) in the mining pits of industry. The Thanatoids could be read as an extension of the preterite in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a people passed over, but now impotently furious at those who wronged them – blind to the reality of that 'time lost forever', what Alan Wilde calls the acceptance of 'the undeniability of time.'³⁰³ Takeshi's karmic hustle will not yield any salvation for the Thanatoids, the oppressive powers need their compliance and passivity as much as 'the War needs coal.' (GR, p. 133)

Further investigation into the mechanic of death in karma, reveals an interesting synergy between Zen and the Thanatoids. When discussing rebirth, James states: 'If [...] one's past actions were largely unwholesome, one will be reborn into a less auspicious station in the cosmic order – that of an animal perhaps, or a ghost.'³⁰⁴ This link between Zen ghosts and the denizens of Shade Creek could potentially suggest that Pynchon sees the Thanatoids as being punished for a past misdeed. Whether this should be interpreted as a direct attack on the hippy era for its eventual compliance with the mainstream (via the 'Tube' etc.), or a surrogate punishment for a sin transgressed upon *them*, it is unclear. We have already examined how acerbic Pynchon can be when exploring the downfall of the hippy movement, so the former is not out of the realms of possibility.

³⁰³ Wilde, 'Love and Death', p. 169.

³⁰⁴ James, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 5.

However, the latter seems to blend better with Pynchon's notion of the preterite as victims.

But once again *Vineland* expands and complicates this issue. The intrusion of Buddhism into the foreground of the novel splits the previously homogeneous preterite mass into two distinct groups:

The first group are the victims, the preterite masses trapped on the periphery, disenfranchised and lost. They are represented in *Vineland* by the Thanatoids. This is the form of preterition that readers of Pynchon would be most familiar with. But in *Vineland* Pynchon loses some of his pity for the victim; blame is beginning to fall on the passive victims for their lack of resistance, their compliance and collaborations. The Thanatoids are a prime example of this. The depiction of the Thanatoid Roast '84 shows the Thanatoids 'honouring' those whose karma remains sullied and complex:

Each year the community chose to honour a Thanatoid old-timer whose karma had kept up a suitably steady rhythm of crime and countercrime over the generations, with facts only grown more complicated, many original wrongs forgotten or defectively remembered, no resolution of even a trivial problem anywhere in sight. Thanatoids didn't exactly "enjoy" these long, resentful tales of injustice modulating, like a ballpark organ riff, to further injustice – but they honoured them. Figures like tonight's Roastee were their Emmy winners, their Hall-of-Famers and role models – their own. (VL, p. 219)

The emphasis on 'their own' at the end of this passage would suggest a resistant ownership of their identity – a self-determined grasp at some stable ontology – but this, with some further analysis, only depicts the Thanatoids fetishizing their existence, creating a particularly campy simulacrum of already kitsch television ritual. As Weed Atman quips, 'if mediated lives, he figured, why not mediated deaths?' (VL, p. 218) The Thanatoids seem to revel in their undead nature, perversely enjoying their preterite

status. There seems to be little salvific about the Thanatoids, only levels of cold comfort in their wry jokes about their fate. Nothing about the Thanatoids embracing Thanatoid culture is redemptive, but instead a grim acceptance of their victimhood. While the television (that which mediates the Thanatoid identity) appears to sometimes function as a genuine community, is it ultimately 'only parody and is a disciplinary device.'³⁰⁵ This victimhood is reminiscent of the 175s³⁰⁶ of Dora in *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose 'liberation was a banishment', who embrace victimhood themselves, adopt 'some really *mean ass* Nazi playmates' and see the zone of their oppression as 'home, and they were homesick.' (*GR*, p. 665) The fetishization of Dora is repeated in the Thanatoid obsession with television.

But while Pynchon doesn't find any disgust in the sexualisation of oppression undertaken by the 175s, his disgust for the Thanatoids becomes palpable. The description of the events of the Thanatoid Roast '84 becomes a condemnation of a squalid American life:

Thanatoid wives bravely did their part to complicate further already tangled marriage histories by flirting with waiters, buspersons, and even other Thanatoids. Everyone drank and smoked furiously, and the menu featured the usual low-end fare, heavy on sugar, starch, salt, ambiguous about where the meat has come from, including which animal, accompanied by bushels of French fries and barrels of shakes. Dessert was a horrible pale chunky pudding. (*VL*, p. 219)

This depiction of the Thanatoid lifestyle is a barely veiled critique of the American culture of the eighties and early nineties, in which Pynchon is suggesting that the Thanatoid personality is systemic, the whole of America is traumatized and in this state of being. Thanatoidism can *thus* be approached holistically, and diagnosed through Zen

³⁰⁵ Mockel-Reike, p. 59.

³⁰⁶ The homosexual inmates of the Dora concentration camp who adopt Blicero as their oppressor.

Buddhism as *trsna*, the 'cravings' or 'thirst' that underpins the suffering of life. Simon James identifies *trsna* as a:

...host of strong and often seemingly uncontrollable desires: craving for things one wants, such as a the sensual pleasures of sex, food and drink; craving to be rid of things one does not want, and craving directed towards oneself – selfish craving, the desire to enhance one's ego, for instance. It is craving that causes us to suffer in each of our lives, and it is, moreover, a craving for existence that ensures that we are reborn time and again in the cycle of *samsara*.³⁰⁷

If American society is trapped in one traumatic karmic cycle, it is a culture driven by its cravings, and held back by its Western terror of death. The Hippy era, while full of adepts of Beat Zen and other Americanized interpretations, was an era driven by its *trsna*. As I have suggested earlier, Pynchon problematizes this by equating this 'freewheeling enthusiasm for life'³⁰⁸ with a child-like state. There is a naivety here that Pynchon discordantly both enjoys and damns. The physical cravings of the Sixties now become the regulated pleasures of the Nixonite years. The final push, in a karmic sense, was to sever the cycle with a fear of death, a Western fear of entropy that belies the Buddhist notion of renewal, the belief that 'you were never going to die' (*VL*, p. 313), could simply not be. Like Kekulé's serpent in *Gravity's Rainbow* 'delivered in a world whose only aim is to *violate* the Circle' (*GR*, p. 412), the terror of death had to be instilled to break that particular hippy spell. Their karma is sullied and stained, but their phobia of death keeps them from any form of transcendence or salvation.

This is where the second, newer group of preterite come in. They are not the victims but the dynamic outlaws, who have a power and a history of their own. It is in *Vineland* we see the figure of the political and/or theological Outlaw taking shape in

³⁰⁷ James, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 5.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 27.

Pynchon's work. While Pynchon's Outlaws in later novels (*Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*) evoke a plethora of religious and political concepts, this deeper exploration of outlawry in regards to preterition seems to have been birthed in *Vineland*, indebted heavily to Zen.

What unites the Outlaw preterite is sacrifice and a genuine moral influence and change on the world around them. In contrast to the Thanatoids who revel in their 'victim fantasy', the more proactive preterite actively engage in resistance, and thus must tread a 'more arduous path of becoming.'³⁰⁹ What divides Outlaw Zen from the traditional form is its rejection of the ascetic, its discourse with the world around it, as opposed to a retreat from it. It also appears to reject a traditional Pynchonian habit, that of 'locating his ideal time or place, the realm of being, somewhere before or outside the world that consciousness perversely segments and destroys,'³¹⁰ in favour of a more immediate desire to interact with the 'now'. Post-*Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon seems to be finding problems in his focus on nostalgia and primordialism, and instead attempts to politicise his theology to relate to 'the concrete, death-tormented world his characters inhabit', and not 'some hypothetical "elsewhere"'.³¹¹

One of the functions of Zen in *Vineland* is to reassess Pynchon's prior reliance on nostalgia as a liberating space. In *Gravity's Rainbow* we see a salvific zone in the form of a distant, primordial time, a space that represents a distant innocence. In *Vineland*, the supposed salvific space is the Sixties, a space he cunningly situates within living memory of the characters (and also some of his readership). This no longer grants the distance of the pre-lapsarian spaces from prior works, and the untouchability they hold. The hypothetical elsewhere no longer holds that status, the utopian space becomes as

³⁰⁹ Wilde, 'Love and Death', p. 175.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 173.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 175.

polluted as the here and now. What could be seen as a progression in *Vineland* is the questioning of a time and place that holds such unquestionably salvific content. As Wilde states, *Vineland* is full of 'plangent, resonant contrast(s)',³¹² a conflict between the imagined utopianism of the sixties and an unwelcome, more sinister intrusion of reality. Wilde is mistaken in calling Pynchon's use of this as 'indeterminate',³¹³ as it is clear that Pynchon is highlighting the naivety of the sixties in order to highlight his own doubt in the redemptive power of nostalgia that is coded into his previous novels. At times the Sixties feel like a childhood state, determinedly locked away from the nightmares that surround it:

It would be easy to remember the day as a soft-focus shot, the kind to be seen on "sensitivity" greetings cards in another few years. Everything in nature, every living being on the hillside that day, strange as it sounded later whenever Zoyd tried to tell about it, was gentle, at peace – the visible word was a sunlit sheep farm. War in Vietnam, murder as an instrument of American politics, black neighbourhoods torched to ashes and death, all must have been off on some other planet. (*VL*, p. 38)

The nostalgic zone maintains its dream-like aura – its mysticism, the desire of the characters to bring it back – but now it faces a new charge. It was never salvific in a holistic sense, merely a retreat. It functions as a simulated safe zone against the true reality of what goes on around it. It is the fragility of this state that causes the trauma that so haunts the Thanatoids, the impossibility to 'remain always on the groovy high known as Love.' (*VL*, p. 38)

Nostalgia is also eroded by the assumption in *Vineland* that time is irreversible. The longing for some distant state is no longer a redemptive act, but instead a sickness. Takeshi knows that history is a 'waste-pit' and you can't go back. Pynchon is critical of

³¹² Ibid, p. 171.

³¹³ Ibid, p. 172.

that desire – a ‘childish’ need for retreat into the comforting past that, as I have indicated, contains little real comfort or content. Pynchon’s use of Zen goes some way to rectify this problematic reappraisal of nostalgia as a salvific space, and this is achieved through the agency of his Zen Outlaw archetypes.

One of the main goals of the Zen Outlaw is to repair the damage done by the antagonistic forces in the novel; the oppressive powers of the government, the collapse of the hippy ideal into crass consumerism, and perhaps even the trap of nostalgia that holds the Thanatoids in its thrall. What is important here is the moral imperative of the Zen Outlaws to assist their fellow preterite. The trauma that is present throughout the novel is treated as a global trauma, and instead of an ascetic retreat into the past, the Outlaw must engage with it and its interconnectivity. The characters post-*Gravity’s Rainbow* no longer have the luxury of escape, but a much more urgent and vital ‘entanglement in the world.’ (VL, p. 180)

DL’s character embodies this preterite responsibility. For her karmic crime against Takeshi is countered by a deep connectivity to him, as well as connectivity to those connected to him, across some broad preterite matrix.

“You -“she [DL] could not believe this, “loudmouth and fool. Sister Rochelle plus a trained Oriental Medicine Team brought you back from the fuckin’ *dead*, you twit, you think they go around doin’ that for free? I’m your doctor bill, bright boy, you pay by havin’ me in your life day in and day out, the person who once murdered you, OK, attached to you by bonds of obligation far beyond what, a disgrace to the folks who invented *giri*, can grasp, it seems.” (VL, p. 176)

Giri is a Japanese value that translates to ‘duty’. This very serious sense of responsibility goes deeper. DL’s spiritual tethering to Takeshi reflects a wider holistic responsibility to others who have been wronged. She sees herself as responsible for ‘the

past as well, and the crimes behind the world, the thousand bloody arroyos in the hinterlands of time that stretched sombrely inland from the honky-tonk coast of Now.' (VL, p. 180) Karmic adjustment is her *giri*, an unending sprawl of inequities against the preterite who cannot take revenge themselves. Pynchon goes so far as to refer to the helpless as 'crippled sparrows', and the Outlaws that seek to rectify their victimhood as 'birds of prey, ragged from the storm, tired from the hunt, in for a little R and R.' (VL, p. 180) The Zen Outlaws act in a fashion similar to an enlightened Zen practitioner – a *Bodhisattva* – who (according to James) 'immerses himself in the evils of the world, not in a quest for new experiences, but to rescue beings from the round of *samsara*.'³¹⁴

With this attuned moral framework in place, Pynchon perhaps allows for even the Thanatoids to be liberated. While Takeshi sees the karmic adjustment business as a hustle, a con, DL sees a more virtuous, arduous and hidden purpose behind it. Sister Rochelle tasks DL to 'become this fool's devoted little, or in your case big – sidekick and to try and balance your karmic account by working off this great wrong you have done to him.' (VL, p. 163) This is not, however, a simple karmic transaction between aggressor (DL) and victim (Takeshi), but instead Rochelle's wider sense of involvement and responsibility. It is this attention to a Zen moral outlook that grants Takeshi's grubby little con a serious viability. DL's karmic sacrifice is what returns Takeshi back from the dead, not the theatrics of the Puncutron. As this more immediate, and more vital, morality emerges in *Vineland*, Pynchon's theological concerns imitate those of Zen, for it undoes the sub-division so common to a Western moral orthodoxy, and instead promotes a holistic, connected worldview.

It is a theology that lauds responsibility for others over selfishness. Irresponsibility becomes a new negative in Pynchon's corpus, a lack of caring and engagement with the

³¹⁴ James, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 117.

world – and this becomes one of the main charges Pynchon lobbies against the Sixties counter-culture. James has this to say about selflessness in Zen:

...it could be argued that someone who lived a carefree, irresponsible life ever centred on the present moment would have failed to appreciate the other-regarding nature of *Bodhisattva* Path, and would to that extent have fallen short of the selflessness and empathy integral to awakening. One could argue that *a genuinely enlightened individual would instead feel an acute sense of responsibility for all beings.*³¹⁵ (emphasis added)

However, while these core tenets have been radically adopted by Pynchon in his post-*Gravity's Rainbow* literature, these tropes are mediated through B-movie violence and profane Americana shtick. The Zen Outlaws sometimes throw themselves into their cravings, perhaps in order to expel the more mystical and ascetic elements, what Inoshiro Sensei calls 'Japanese insular craziness.' (VL, p. 122) Thus the Zen material has a focused purpose that situates it as new and separate from other theological matrices we have seen prior. Outlaw Zen is neither mystic nor ascetic, it does away with any Buddhist notion of escape from life, and instead offers us a framework in which we can see salvation in the reparation of the world, if not its restoration. It is a theology of the Now, a point of view that demands of Pynchon the engagement with the real world over a hypothetical, nostalgic or mythical 'Other' world.

Zen as a Postsecular Space

As I have shown, the Zen material in *Vineland* shows us both progression and change in how Pynchon enters into a dialogue with a theology, and how his notion of

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 117.

salvation changes focus. Pynchon has discarded his reliance on a distant nostalgia of primordialism and primitivism so common in his older texts. This suggests an older Pynchon doubts the importance of these mythic spaces, or at least the viability of them as a solid method of salvation or transcendence. In *Vineland*, Pynchon's concern lies truly in the real world, an entanglement in the real nastiness – the dystopian nightmare of a right-wing, clamped-down 1984 California – and what ethics and virtues could provide succour against this.

Another radical progression in *Vineland* is how Pynchon deals with time, specifically with the passing thereof. Pre-*Vineland*, Pynchon coded into his novels this notion of the past irrupting into the present, a chiliastic return of a distant redemptive Other, lost in time but due a return. The past was important; it was where the salvific was situated, it was the innocent origin from which the world became corrupted. In *Vineland* this is no longer the case. The distant redemptive spaces are dragged into living memory; they are complicated by Pynchon constantly contrasting them with horror, so the reader's interaction with these spaces becomes unsettling and 'discordant.'³¹⁶

With Pynchon's primordialism brought into question, he now replaces it with a salvific notion of community and a holistic sense of responsibility that he derives from Zen Buddhism. We see the preterite – so often portrayed as 'passed-over' victims – taking up arms, practising a dynamic form of outlawry that incorporates for the first time a coherent mythology and ethics for a preterite community existence. Preterition also takes a darker trajectory, with preterite ghosts (the Thanatoids) who are both suffering the collective *duhka* of the world, and also have a westernized terror of death. But Pynchon sees redemption now in community, in the ethical care of others. As

³¹⁶ Wilde, 'Love and Death', p. 172.

Wilde writes: 'they are in their own way involved, responsible, and concerned for others. This, and the fact that the trajectory of their lives moves them from death inflicted and received to life restored, even transformed into something like love.'³¹⁷ This is now the resistance core of Pynchon's novels, no longer the distant 'Holy Centre', but the more immediate and vital ethic of compassion in the Now.

What supports this thesis, and also explains Pynchon's choice of Zen over any other kind of Buddhism, is Zen's non-ascetic elements, its focus on the environment over a transcendent 'exit' from the world. For this I will quote Simon James on the 'Pure Land':

Some schools of the Mahayana spoke of a heavenly 'Pure Land' which would provide a kind of springboard to *Nirvana* for those beings who were virtuous enough to be reborn there. For to be reborn in a Pure Land would be to find oneself in a spiritual paradise in which even the rustling of the leaves in the trees proclaimed the *Dharma*. Who could fail to attain awakening in such a place? For Zen, however, the Pure Land is not some far-off destination, which can only be reached by securing an auspicious rebirth, it is the very world in which we live³¹⁸.

This Zen notion has a lot of synergy with *Vineland*. The 'Pure Land' concept seems to be present across all of Pynchon's novels, a mythic zone that is sought after. In *V.* we see Vheissu, in *Lot 49* the alternative world of the Trystero, in *Gravity's Rainbow* numerous mythic locations are cited. Post-*Vineland*, Mason and Dixon explore a primordial America, and in *Against the Day* we have Shambhala. Even *Inherent Vice*, seemingly a spiritual successor to *Vineland*, makes use of Lemuria as its 'Pure Land'. Only *Vineland* does not have such an element, rather instead adopting this Zen trope that the Pure Land is the land of now, 'Vineland the Bold'. The ethics of *Vineland*

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 176.

³¹⁸ James, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 68.

become environmental ethics, the holistic care of the unity that aggressive Western orthodoxy has dismantled.

Three years after the publication of *Vineland*, Pynchon wrote 'Nearer, my Couch, to Thee' for the *New York Times*, one of a series on the Seven Deadly Sins. In it, he mentions 'Acedia', one of the lesser sins under the Sloth 'family'. He describes it *thus*:

“Acedia” in Latin means sorrow, deliberately self-directed, turned away from God, a loss of spiritual determination that then feeds back on in to the process, soon enough producing what are currently known as guilt and depression, eventually pushing us to where we will do anything, in the way of venial sin and bad judgement, to avoid the discomfort.³¹⁹

Pynchon's definition of Acedia seems to deliberately contain undertones of Zen, in particular the spiritual suffering of *duhka*, in the cycle of *samsara*. However, Pynchon suggests that perhaps sloth is not such a negative after all, at least in Western terms. Sorrow is the enemy of productivity, the sacred idol of the West, it is the resistance to capitalist, divided-up time, it is non-linear in that 'we may for now at least have found the illusion, the effect, of controlling, reversing, slowing, speeding and repeating time – even imagining that we can escape it. Sins against video time will have to be radically redefined.'³²⁰

But it is still illusion. The Tube itself is not a salvific entity, but the Acedic state of mind it places the nation in could well be. The suffering of life exists in its 'pursuit of quotidian lusts, angers and the rest,'³²¹ something that we know keeps the Thanatoids stuck in their karmic cycle. Perhaps, in what could be considered an appendix (or even an addendum) to *Vineland*, Pynchon asks for a rejection of this base Acedia, of *duhka*, 'our background radiation, our easy-listening station – it is everywhere, and no longer

³¹⁹ Thomas Pynchon, 'Nearer my Couch, to Thee', *The New York Times Book Review*, (6 June 1993), p.1.

³²⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

³²¹ Ibid, p. 2.

noticed.³²² It is an urge in Pynchon that all become outlaws of some kind, engaged in active resistance against orthodoxy and its oppressive modes, to become *Bodhisattvas* that liberate the Thanatoids and 'sit with our heads in virtual reality, glumly refusing to be absorbed in its idle, disposable fantasies, eve those about superheroes of Sloth back in Sloth's good old days, full of leisurely but lethal misadventures with the ruthless villains of the Acedia Squad.'³²³

³²² Ibid, p. 2.

³²³ Ibid, p. 3.

CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this thesis has not been to provide an encyclopaedic analysis of how Thomas Pynchon uses theology as a form of resistance against the myriad power structures across his corpus, but to open up the possibility of religious material being considered as a primary concern for Pynchon as opposed to an esoteric, peripheral aside. I have aimed to show how important theology is to Pynchon's politics of resistance, how ubiquitous it is, and how we can locate a theological basis behind most of the major concerns covered already by Pynchon scholars. Religious material lends itself to a myriad of Pynchonian topics, from the secular power structures of capitalism, totalitarianism and fascism being underpinned by Gnostic and Calvinist dogma, through to the spiritual aspect of anarchism via animism, Pynchon's use of esoteric spiritualities to explore emergent technologies and scientific pioneership, and issues of usurpation and (mis)appropriation of religious modes by controlling forces via Pynchon's satirical view of the New Age.

John McClure's exploration of Pynchon's postsecularism laid the groundwork for this analysis, providing a framework for considering the function of religion within wider concerns, but I have attempted to take his reading further, and provide a sense of spiritual resistance in Pynchon that departs from McClure's postsecular definitions. His concept of 'partial' faiths, religious engagements that are not 'particular[ly] impatient to move on to some fully elaborated form of belief and practice,'³²⁴ relates to a passive, 'soft' approach to religiously inflected resistant movements. Texts converting to religious modes are only 'partial conversions,'³²⁵ and religion functions as an intruder

³²⁴ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, p. 4.

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

upon the secular, shifting in and out of preconceived notions of reality. Pynchon's religious material has more teeth than this, and his transference of the world from a secular one to a spiritual one is total, not partial. Secular institutions such as capitalism, police states and the industrial complex are entirely framed as theological structures, the mechanisms of control; surveillance and manipulation are dealt with via monolithic and orthodox religions. Eddins' work on the Gnostic content of Pynchon's oppressive systems shows this in action, depicting the typically secular world as being instead a complex construction of Gnostic concepts and mystic practice.

McClure claims that the secular superstructure of the world now requires a postsecular reconsideration, and this resistance becomes inflected with mystical and esoteric religious resonance. Oppressive power structures are mapped out by Pynchon through his socio-historical engagement with the religious dogma that constitutes them. A spiritual debate does not in this case act as a thematic layering in the texts, but instead spirituality and the history of theological ideas becomes the arena in which the narratives of power and resistance play out, and Pynchon's critical stance on antagonistic power becomes a critique of orthodox and fundamentalist religious systems. Pynchon's cosmology is *already* a converted one, allowing for a discourse on politics, history and power to be considered as an exploration of dogmatic visions of the world, and thus resistance is addressed via a complex and extensive examination of alternative dogmas, spiritual possibilities, and varied modes of practice.

McClure also claims that spiritual resistance takes particular forms. Postsecular discourse draws from a pluralist engagement with a variety of religious forms, and produces 'new, weakened and hybridised idioms of belief' that create 'ideologically

mixed and confusing middle zones.’³²⁶ This approach to postsecular resistance suggests a passive and fragile resistance that does not hold a coherent agenda, or contain the substance and focus required for sustaining preterite communities. This form of spiritual resistance may be present in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, where the presence of oppression is stronger and more invasive, but Pynchon reassesses the fragility of resistance in his later works.

A serious stance on spiritual possibilities is present in *Against the Day* and *Vineland*, one that goes beyond McClure’s partial movement into religious modes. In these later works, Pynchon is more interested in a pragmatic and sustained approach to spiritual resistance, and we have seen how this reforms resistance from something ephemeral and weak into focused, coherent and very politically charged religious forms. Pynchon creates a more rough and ready spiritual landscape, inflected with notions of outlawry and alternative, practical methods of exchange. He demands a disciplined approach to the creation and maintenance of postsecular spaces that engages with these different modes of exchange that in turn function separately to mainstream modes prescribed by orthodox thought. Strong ethical systems are created within these postsecular communities, promoting sacrifice, selflessness and a responsibility to act both socially and ecologically.

McClure’s postsecular world is one that posits retreat and refuge as an option of resistance, a take on V.’s ‘keep cool but care’ (V., p. 366) ethic. However, via closer reading of the texts, we see this approach to be increasingly insufficient in Pynchon’s serious take on resistance. No longer is it enough to find refuge from the oppressive systems of the world, to seek an ascetic retreat. Indeed, asceticism, as I have shown in this thesis, is a mechanic used by the master control system to disengage with the

³²⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

ecological and human. Instead postsecular communities must engage in active resistance, establish strong agendas and create strict ethical structures that battle and fight against oppression. The Kunoichi Sisterhood in *Vineland* and the anarchists in *Against the Day* all promote a sustained and hard-fought-for resistant model that moves away from McClure's transient and partial zones of resistance into more vital and complete spiritual beliefs. Indeed, *Vineland* provides a critique of postsecular retreat, displaying this "weakened and hybridized" spiritual consumption as the domain of New Age thought. Such partial engagement with religion always gives way to co-option and appropriation of spirituality, where only a complete and rigorous engagement with the religious can create persistent and ethically sound spiritual worlds.

Lastly, this all brings us back to Pynchon's double quality. McClure's theory of a conflict between singular, orthodox thought and pluralism provides us with a strong foundation for Pynchon's spiritual content, but it is the constantly shifting boundaries within this conflict that truly shapes the discourse. Postsecular spaces are in one instance framed as salvific, but then also heavily critiqued, in the particular case of New Ageism. Oppressive structures are also mined for salvific content; oppressive religious structures are given resistant counterparts (see the adoption of preterition that forms the identity of postsecular spaces, and the counter-technologies of *Against the Day*, for example) that show Pynchon constantly blurring the boundaries between religious modes, and eventually creating a third space that both valorises and critiques religious options. This third space does not categorise spiritualities into oppressive and resistant forms, but instead examines how their varied practices can inform resistance, and create a viable and sustainable alternative to an ethical and responsible religious way of life. It is faith, a complete and considered faith that explores mankind's potential for resisting power structure, that Pynchon takes seriously, and only through this rigorous and

critical approach to faith can resistance function within his texts. This faith can never be partial; it can never be adopted half-heartedly without personal cost, sacrifice, and communion with a preterite tradition. Partial faith always falls short of the mark.

Where next for a Postsecular Pynchon?

While this thesis covers *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Against the Day* and *Vineland* in great detail, the other novels still hold much untapped material that can illuminate the work I have achieved here. Indeed, while I make the claim in this thesis that the theologies in these works are hamstrung by a younger Pynchon's Gnostic-infused nihilism, the texts are worth being considered as early postsecular texts. As for my animistic concerns, *Mason & Dixon* provides much in the way of animistic and eco-critical content, and also stands astride the gap between *Against the Day* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, acting as a mediating zone between the sometimes conflicting themes and concerns of these two texts. While I did not require the text in this case (it was my intention to show the extremes of Pynchon's progression from one novel to the other) *Mason & Dixon* requires a detailed postsecular exploration of its animistic content. In terms of the material on New Age and appropriation in *Vineland*, 2009's *Inherent Vice* provides with an updated take on the downfall of the hippy era, this time in the form of psychedelic noir. A study into how the themes I have explored in *Vineland* translate to this novel nineteen years later would be required to further examine Pynchon's spiritual progress. *Bleeding Edge*, a novel that was published in the same week as the completion of this thesis, will hopefully provide fresh and exciting approaches for further research.

While I aimed to cover Calvinism, Gnosticism, animism, spiritualism, New Ageism and Zen Buddhism in this thesis, there is still a plethora of theological systems that could be explored to further my research. Kathryn Hume has done some exciting and crucial work on Pynchon's Catholic influences, but there are still many religious frontiers remaining for exploration. While I touched briefly on Victorian spiritualism in chapter three, a more expansive analysis of that historical phase and how Pynchon subsumed it into his text is required. Alchemical practices, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism and Masonic ritual have all existed in Pynchon's spiritual panorama and have not been studied in depth. Egyptian and Hellenic theologies also make up some considerable material, of which I believe Xavier Del Pont is working on. Islam, featuring heavily in the Kirghiz material and the Koran translation episodes in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is mostly absent from Pynchon criticism, and since the changing public perception of the religion since 9/11, the demonization of it and its misplaced synergy with terrorism, some analysis of this world religion's place in Pynchon's theological structure would be advantageous.

Overall, I hope that this study has successfully pushed ahead in the study of the religious in the field of political and socio-historical studies of Pynchon's texts. McClure's analysis of a postsecular Pynchon remains a pivotal point in such considerations, and I hope that my closer reading that pushes his theories into more complex and fresh territory can lead to further investigations into this vital field of research. Joanna Freer has already provided us with religiously inflected material on Africanism and civil-rights issues in Pynchon in her essay 'Thomas Pynchon and the Black Panther Party: Revolutionary Suicide in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' and Kathryn Hume continues to produce illuminating works on Pynchon's various religious engagements. Papers delivered at the recent International Pynchon Week 2013, held at Durham

University, also show promising new forays into spiritual areas, with Joanna Freer again exploring Buddhist themes in *Mason & Dixon*, Jennifer Backman exploring themes of burial and Orphism in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tiina Käkälä-Puumala providing us with research on ghostliness, and Douglas Haynes providing new research on alternative systems of ethical exchange in *Vineland*. To conclude, a scholarly reaction to religion and spiritual motifs in Pynchon appears to be moving into exciting and varied new ground.

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